

**the marble forest**

# THE MARBLE FOREST

*Theo Durrant*



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*I, Theo Durrant, dedicate this book to the twelve who  
have recalled me to life:*

TERRY ABLER

ANTHONY BOUCHER

EUNICE MAYS BOYD

FLORENCE OSTERN FAULKNER

ALLEN HYMSON

GARY LUCAS

DANA LYON

LENORE GLEN OFFORD

VIRGINIA RATH

RICHARD SHATTUCK

DARWIN L. TEILHET

WILLIAM WORLEY

*. . . whether or no they ever discover the committers  
of this crime matters little to me now, for I, before the  
whole world, announce my innocence . . ." (my words  
on the scaffold)*

How long could a four-year-old girl live buried in a casket? The man on the phone said a medium-sized one—painted gray, worth seventy-five dollars. He said five hours—maybe six. And then, with a choked-back laugh, hung up.

Dr. Barratt had known that there were those in the little mining town who disliked him. He had moved to Red Forks only seven years before and somehow was always stepping on the wrong toes. But only a madman, who wanted to drive him mad too, would have tried to strike at him through Midge.

Telling him she was buried in the cemetery might have been a trick, but as he dug frenziedly, a pattern appeared. And as the story flashes back to the lives of the people in whose graves he is hunting and they tell their tales, bit by bit the jigsaw of his horrifying puzzle fits together.

Here is a high-tension and frightening mystery, unusual in concept, express-train fast, and genuinely different.

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The earth rumbles, and across the planet, six thousand miles away, the quiver of a sensitive needle is noted by a man in a room. Somewhere else a man sends a signal to the moon and from a distance of forty times six thousand miles comes the unmistakable echo. They are wonderful men, these, who have fashioned the instruments that reach into space and pull forth information. These are the quick, and distance holds no barrier to their ever inquisitive communication lines, be that distance six thousand or two hundred and forty thousand miles.

But between the quick and the dead there is no communication, be that distance only six feet. The voices of the dead, murmuring away about what happened while they were still living, go on unperceived by the quick. No radar equipment will receive their signals; no seismograph will record their vibrations. But they are there, nevertheless, these voices of the dead, telling their stories, although the living will never know what they have to tell.



## THE MARBLE FOREST

I • 7.50 P.M. to 8 05 P.M

NOBODY, as it happened, was on the county highway at this hour of a chill spring evening. Nobody witnessed the headlong speed of the sedan as it shot out of town, but in any case the caduceus displayed on front and rear would give it license. Perhaps, if anyone had seen it, the sight of the doctor's car going east toward the mines would have been so familiar as to pass almost unnoticed.

The sedan did not continue toward the mine district eleven miles away. Its flight was checked for one instant, so that the taillight, glowing, lit crimson as a sunset the sign that said: RFD FORKS—1 MILE. Then it swerved north on a side road and fled upward into the hills, a terrible urgency apparent in the way its wheels attacked the wet surface. Small fountains of gravel spurted up to rattle on the underside of fenders; stones

drummed upon metal, the slanting rain drummed upon glass, the windshield wipers swept half-arcs and hesitated and flicked over. The road turned and doubled back. It dipped for a moment and rose again. The car took dip and rise and curve without a diminution of speed.

Yet the mines were far over the hills along the country road; there were no settlers in these hills, no one for a doctor to visit. No one at all but the dead.

Once the headlights lit a washboard stretch ahead, imperfectly repaired as yet after the winter's rains, tonight streaming again with a hundred rivulets. The car chattered and slewed across the rough ground, and the woman beside the driver spoke in a low voice

"Easy, Rod. It won't help if we're both killed before we get there."

The man made no sound in response, though the pressure of his foot on the accelerator eased momentarily. His face, jutting forward to peer through the windshield, might have been carved from gray stone. A few seconds later, when the car topped a rise and its lights swept the valley below, there was a faint sibilance as his breath sucked in through tight held teeth.

The last half mile was downhill, and still the road curved. The twin beams swept back and forth across the valley, striking dim and rainswept gleams from what lay ahead.

It might have been one of those desolate spaces seen in a forest that has burned, so many years ago that the black bark has fallen away, the sun has bleached and polished the stunted trunks that remain, and wild shrubs have sprung up to carpet the ground. Yet those trunks rise to a burned-off point; these were of odd shapes,

square and low, or pyramid-formed, and one or two gnarled and irregular. Still the illusion persisted, as the car rounded one last curve and drew up briefly by an iron gate hung between two crumbling pillars. Beyond lay a forest of marble, whose gnarled trunks were carved into the shapes of angels that wept, whose low, and pyramidal stumps bore carved words. AT REST, were the words, and SACRED TO THE MEMORY, and BE-LOVED HUSBAND. Some of them in the hollow to the left could not be read at all. The wind and rain over a hundred years had smoothed them and crumbled their edges.

There was a cottage by the gate, old and weather-beaten but kept with some attempt at trimness. The man peered out at its darkened windows. "So that's all right," he said in a thread of voice, and let in the sedan's clutch again to pass the iron gates.

"All right?" the woman exclaimed. "But"—her breath caught harshly—"I thought he'd know—we could ask —"

"Have you forgotten who he is? Old Hummel. Donna Parks's grandfather."

It was the longest sequence of words he had spoken since they left town. They came in a dry monotone, as if the man were either preoccupied or talking over a deep physical pain that must not escape into his voice.

The sedan lurched on, along an overgrown cart-track. On the floor in the rear something clanked heavily. In a moment the man added: "There's no one else I'm sure of. I told you."

"No one?" the woman breathed.

"Maybe a few besides the ones we tried. But by the time we'd hunted for them—and talked, and weren't

believed, and had them try to stop us—we get more help from the wrong places—” He paused, and then added briefly: “We’ve got five hours—maybe.”

The woman did not answer. She swallowed with a painful constriction of her throat.

He brought the car to a stop behind a screen of conifers. “The old fence is down, around at this side. Just as well if nobody spots the car.” The door swung open and he was out, slipping on fallen needles in his haste, recovering balance with a powerful twist of his body. The woman slid out beside him, and as he reached in to darken the car’s lights she flicked on the beam of a flashlight.

“You’ve got the other light in your pocket?” she said in a dry tone that matched his.

“Yes.” He flipped over canvas on the floor of the car, and pulled out a pick and two shovels. “Watch the wire there, Polly.”

“Do we—separate, and both look—?”

“Better stay together for a while. Two of us in one place will make it go faster.”

They stepped through the screen of trees, and the low smooth stumps of marble shone white in the flashlight beam. There were sodden weeds underfoot; a few headstones leaned tipsily, and a few had fallen and shattered.

“Now!” the man said; and then his taut assurance seemed to falter, and for the first time there was feeling in his voice. “Where do we begin?” he said. “Christ! *Where do we begin?*”

II • 5.15 P.M. to 7.35 P.M.

THE rain had begun before five, a few minutes after Dr. Rodney Barratt left his office. When he returned half an hour later it was coming down steadily through a leaden, early twilight, and townspeople had almost vanished from the four shopping streets of Red Forks.

For all their emptiness, the streets were brave with neon signs, red and green in reflection on the shining wetness of pavement, and streams of yellow light gushed from shop windows and ground-floor offices. The doctor's car cased diagonally toward the curb and stopped in a shaft of illumination, half from Frederick's Drug Store, half from the police station across the street. Barratt rolled up the window and fastened his raincoat tight around his throat before he stepped out, chin lowered, into the drive of the rain.

Through its soft thunder he heard the strains of juke boxes from the bars down the street, two or three tunes mingling in an effect that was oddly melancholy rather than discordant. There was another sound; he turned his head to identify it. From across the street a loud male voice was calling: "Doc! Hey, Doc!"

Barratt hesitated, mutably telling himself that Jim Tyloe could damn well cross the street if he wanted to see him, then he thought of the possibility that an accident might have been reported to the police station, and went swiftly toward the bulky figure silhouetted against hard bright light. His conscience stirred uneasily at the thought that he'd been unavailable for some forty minutes.

Tyloe shut the door deliberately, rolling a cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other—probably the same cigar, Barratt thought with distaste, that he'd been chewing at one o'clock, and three, and 'a quarter to five; from the doctor's office window Tyloe had been visible all afternoon, heels up on his desk in the ditty bareness of the police station. He did not remove the cigar as he said "Been wanting to talk to you, Doc."

"Anything wrong?" said Barratt coldly.

"Naw, not much. Just a warning. I been noticing that car of yours—parked diagonal that way, it sticks out too far into the street. Kind of obstructs traffic."

"My office has been there for eight years, Tyloe, and the car's never bothered anyone."

"Yeah, but this is a new car—nice shiny new. Expensive, too. I'm thinkin' about you, Doc," said Tyloe, his small eyes narrowing in a patent parody of good nature. "Be too bad if somebody crashed into the back of it, wouldn't it?"

"You mean if the old police car hit it on purpose?" In the face of constant sly hostility, Barratt could not bring himself to temporize. Tyloe ignored the remark.

"You wouldn't have a leg to stand on, legally. You know that, Doc?" The cigar rolled slowly to the other corner of the loose mouth, and Barratt looked narrowly at the police chief's face, trying to read it. For a long time he had been aware that the big, coarse-voiced man was his enemy—that Tyloe or his henchman Merkle would injure him covertly in any way they could. This sort of thing would be like them—petty, malicious, contrived to seem within the law. The hard face with its broken red blood vessels showed, at the moment, nothing but its habitual jeering expression.

"I'll bear it in mind," said Barratt levelly, with a

contemptuous glance at the chief. "And the next time you see fit to waste my time, d'you mind doing it out of office hours?"

"Oh, *these* your office hours?" said Tyloe elaborately, grinning. "I thought they was your social time."

Barratt went out without answering and sloshed across the street. He lifted a brief glance to the second-story windows over the drugstore, and saw that they were lighted though there might be no patients waiting for him, his secretary would be there. "Damn it," he thought—"I stuck my chin out for that one. If I leave the office for an hour, everybody in town thinks I've been to Sylvia's."—And often enough they were right, he had to admit. Even today he'd gone, though the trip had been wasted; Sylvia hadn't been at home.

It was in an angry and defensive mood that he ran up the drug-scented flight of inner stairs and took off his raincoat to shake it before he entered. There was no one in the waiting room or in the surgery; Mildred, the nurse, went home at five sharp—probably to do more nursing, poor girl, she had an invalid husband—but Paula Neale always stayed forty minutes longer. His faithfulness, Barratt was well aware, sprang from devotion not to himself personally, but to duty.

He looked round the door to the inner office where Miss Neale was filing letters. "Hi, Polly. Any calls?"

"Mrs. Kushins about five." This was the doctor's housekeeper. "No message."

"No patients in either, I suppose?"

"No." Miss Neale lifted her dark head as if to add something, but refrained.

"I know, I know! The better class ones haven't been coming around lately, and the ones we keep don't pay. Well, that flat rate from the mine company'll keep

me from starvation—and pay your salary, and Mildred's. Until I neglect my patients you can quit worrying." He sat down at his desk and scowled at the day's letters, he was still tingling from his outburst of irritation.

Polly Neale kept on with her filing, but her reply was crisp. "Until we complain you can quit talking that way. Have I ever mentioned neglect?"

"Of course not. I'm sorry, Polly," Barnatt shook off his ill humor and swung round, smiling at her. He was a tall, squarely built man in his middle thirties, indeterminate in coloring except for brilliant gray eyes that seemed to catch the light like mica when he was amused. Now he told himself now Polly had never mentioned neglect, but there was a certain alt of her dark head that said more than words. Every time it left the office in the late afternoon, it managed to convey that his private affairs were none of her business, but that she couldn't approve of them. On one or two occasions when she'd had to call him, at Sylvia Stevenson's, her voice had taken on an extra shade of coolness and impersonality that made her seem more than ever the archetype of the perfect secretary.

"Well," he thought as he rapidly signed his letters—she's a good girl, no matter what she thinks of me personally, she doesn't let it affect our professional teamwork. He watched her finish the filing, silent and deft.

"It's only five thirty," he said. "You could still catch the six ten down to Sacramento and be in time for most of that testimonial banquet."

Miss Neale glanced down, smoothed the skirt of her brown wool dress, and gave him a sidelong smile. "I think I won't try. Are you going?"

"No. I sent Miss Humm flowers, and she knows

what a doctor's obligations are. We're represented. There are some good Red Forks citizens there to help her retire in a blaze of glory." He would rather have liked to go, he thought. Miss Hannum had been campaigning for liberal legislation since the days of Hiram Johnson and his reforms of California codes. The strict conservatives of the district were staying away from the banquet as if she were a member of the Borgia family.

Barratt looked thoughtful and added: "You're not busy tonight, then? I wonder—would there be a chance of your doing some extra work after a while? I have some points to add to that paper for the state convention."

She turned, her eyes lifting with a flash of hazel, and animation returning to her voice. "I might, if they're good points."

"If they're not good enough, you'll fix them." There never was anyone like Polly to work with, that logical mind of hers caught an idea before it was fairly formulated, had it in shape or acted on it while you were still feeling for the exact words.

"Do you want me back here after dinner, Doctor?" The nice etiquette by which he was "Doctor" in the office and "Rod" after they had crossed the threshold always entertained him.

He glanced about the office, bare, bright, antiseptic. "I have a better idea than that. Sade will give us both dinner at my house, and we can talk it over while we're eating. Okay?"

Polly Neale nodded. She took her satin finished raincoat from the closet, and tied on orange babushka over brown waves of hair. "Any chance of Marjorie's joining us at dinner?" she asked as the last light was flicked off and the doctor opened the door.

"Oh, she'll be around," Rodney Barratt grinned again, fondly. "Sade will have fed her, she has strong ideas about the schedule for four year olds but we'll have Midge hanging on our necks until a quarter to seven."

Polly's heels muted by some rubber boot, thudded lightly down the stairs after him. She could hang on mine as long as she liked, bliss her, but of course Mrs. Kushins is right.

"I was sure you'd agree with her," said Rodney lightly. He added to himself: Marjorie's once been up until nine o'clock when I took her to Sylvia Svenson's. You'd have thought her health was permanently impaired.

He backed out of his parking place. The car was still undamaged he thought with a glance across the street. Jim Lylog was there in the window of the police station, watching him go, and as the car slid slowly past the door of a bar a block down the street the other half of Red Forks's police force, Joe Muckle, emerged onto the sidewalk, looking up and down with a hurried expression. "Missed me that time," said Rodney Barratt aloud, with a chuckle.

The small white house had been home to him for seven years, since he had established his practice in Red Forks and married Alice Corbin, who had lived here all her life. There had been no point in moving away after Alice's death last year. Sade Kushins, a remote cousin, had brought up Alice from childhood and had managed their household during those six years of marriage. Now she was foster mother to Marjorie in turn, and housekeeper to Dr. Barratt. He had thought it better to stay and face the situation, to let them all be

come accustomed to the silence in that upper room where the soft voice had sounded for all those dragging months of Alice's last illness.

He was used to that special silence now, but the quiet that greeted him when he opened the front door was new, and also the darkness except for the bulb on the porch and one lamp in the living room.

Well! Barratt said. Rather a cool welcome for us. Where is everyone? he added, raising his voice.

Perhaps Mrs. Kushins didn't expect you, said Polly in a flat tone that brought the spark to his gray glance.

Since she always expects me any time of the day or night until so I telephone Midge! he called, raising his head toward the staircase. Midget!

There was no answer. He glanced about the lower floor and then slung on his chain-link coat and hat.

Midge are you hiding from your Dog? your young imp? I bet that's it. She's up and in a closet somewhere giggling. Let me have your coat, Polly. Sit down, come out.

He went up the stairs two at a time, muttering. Ready or not you must get out. I'll be waiting the goal or not.

Polly Neale stood there a moment, just staring, her head scarf and pushing up the dattered waves of her hair. The sounds were muted but plain, soft, going from room to room, for the door was open and closed again. Her eyes followed the sounds.

That's odd, said Barratt from the top of the stairs. He descended with thoughtful deliberation. No sign of Sade either. Well, they must be together, maybe they went out for a fifteen minute shopping trip.

The hall was warm, scented with the baking that had been done earlier in the day, but there was no hearten-

ing smell of dinner meats, no bustle in the kitchen. An old wall clock ticked off seconds and minutes in the space by the sitting-room door: ten minutes of six; five minutes of six.

"They'll be here," said Barratt, stooping to touch a match to the fire in the old-fashioned grate. "I'll fix us a drink. Bourbon, Polly? Fizz-water?"

"Oh—thank you, I think not."

He laughed. "Unbend, Polly, unbend. This isn't Minnie Young's rooming house, there's nobody to check up on you here."

After a moment's hesitation she stretched out her hand for the glass. He went on lightly: "It's a tribute to you that you can live in that nest of gossips and never have a scandal pinned on you."

"Maybe I have had," Polly Neale murmured, "and you've never heard it. There are—lots of stories going around town that you never hear."

"So?" Barratt said. "Well, I can guess at some of the things people say about *me*."

"Can you?"

"At least four persons asked me today if I'm planning to be at the Whittleby funeral tomorrow morning, all of 'em with a meaningful look. It was bad enough when the poor guy joined the medical corps and went to war; some of Old Doc's friends acted as if I'd marched him to the recruiting office at the point of a gun. Now they have to dig him up and bring him clear across the ocean to bury him here, and the friends seem to be resurrecting their feelings at the same time. If this village is going to be down on me," he concluded rather grimly, "I wish to the Lord it'd be for something I've really done!"

"With these other things," said Polly rather hesi-

tantly, "there's no use in *your* denying them, of course. That would just make them worse—easier to believe."

Barratt glanced at her. "I suppose you deny them for me. You're a faithful soul, Polly."

• She continued to look thoughtfully into the fire. They sipped the drinks in silence, while the clock ticked on and the fire crackled upward through piled logs. Once the doctor got up to look through a window that faced downstreet, and more than once he tilted a wrist to check the time, frowning faintly.

A rush of cool air and the sound of footsteps came from the back door, and he rose, moving toward the kitchen with the drink in his hand. "Hello, late birds," he called out.

The woman who came in was alone. She stopped at the far side of the adjoining dining-room, "breathing fast and glancing with wide, light eyes from Barratt to his guest. "Well, Doctor Rod, for goodness' sake!" she said. "I was over to Ollie's, and just happened to glance out the window when I seen your car out front. Come over as fast as I could. How'd you come to change your mind so sudden? There, I s'pose you phoned and couldn't raise nobody. 'Evening, Miss Neale."

She was a plump, rather flat-faced woman with soft pale cheeks that shook almost imperceptibly as she moved. A comfortable woman, one would say, with those smooth braids of grayish hair that had once been blond, and that full bosom; yet there was something not quite comfortable in the complete lack of expression in her eyes whenever she looked at the doctor. Now and then she wondered vaguely how long she had been wearing that blank face: a year, two years, six months? It needn't concern him, she kept his house perfectly and was like a not-too-indulgent grandmother-to

the baby. They got on well enough. No need for intimacy.

"I'm sorry you hurried," he answered. "It doesn't help that knee of yours. Where's Midget?"

Sade Kushins looked at him for several seconds. Again there was that stiffness of the eyes, again the faint unease it brought. "Why, up to Mis' Stevenson's," she said deliberately. "Where I thought you was."

"Mrs. Stevenson's?" Barratt's voice was sharp. "There's some mistake, I think. Did Sylvia come for her?"

"No," said Mrs. Kushins with a faint but perceptible sniff. "I hat Violet come for her."

"Violet--you mean Violet Prager?"

"Uh huh. The one worked for you a while back, while Miss Neale was on her vacation."

Dr. Barratt glanced from her to Polly Neale, relaxed in her chair, her eyes lowered. He set down his glass carefully on a small table. He said: "I don't quite understand. Mis Stevenson wasn't at home a few minutes after five when I drove by there. Her car was gone, and the only light was in the servant's room at the back. What time was this, Sade?"

"Just about five."

"And what happened? What was said?"

Mrs. Kushins lowered herself to the edge of a straight chair. There was a certain defiance, a self-righteousness about the way she held herself upright. "Well, it seemed funny to me. Doctor Rod, but then—" (In the brief pause that punctuated her sentence he could almost hear an addition. 'But then, so many things have been funny') "Marjorie was playin' like always, pretendin' to cut out cookies in my kitchen, and that

Violet drove up in her dad's little rattletrap car, and says she's come for the baby. You was goin' to Mis' Stevenson's for supper, seemed like, and Marjorie was to be took up there to meet you. 'Twasn't my place, in them circumstances, to say no, she couldn't go. I never did have much use for that Prager girl, but Mis' Stevenson took her up and made a lot of her, and like as not she's takin' some of it out now in gettin' her to run errands."

"It may not have been your place to question it," said Barratt smoothly. "You didn't think, however, of checking with me?"

"I did call 'I talked to Miss Neale." Again there was a hint of defiance, though the light blue eyes remained expressionless. "She says you d drove out west of town, she didn't know where. I says: I guess to go to Mis' Stevenson's, like he does three four nights a week?" and Miss Neale says: 'I don't know.'"

"Perfect secretary," Barratt murmured, with a glance at Polly Neale. She sat unmoving in her brown dress, her hand resting lightly on the arm of the old leather chair, but now her eyes were lifted and gazing at some remote point. He thought he could guess at the inflection she had put into those noncommittal words.

"So," Mrs. Kushins finished, "I done her up in her waterproof suit, and off she went, trottin' down the walk with her Teddy. Pleased as Punch, she was, to be goin' out to supper after dark."

In three minds the picture flashed. Marjorie, in the pink snow suit and hood that made her look like an oversized Teddy bear herself, her round face beaming with expectancy, holding the shabby toy that was her

constant companion, and disappearing into the spring dusk. Three pairs of eyes met and lit with a shock of apprehension.

"You don't suppose she's—that there's anything wrong?" Mrs. Kushins blurted out, getting to her feet. "I shouldn't have let her go!"

"No, no, Sade, I'm sure it's all right. I'll just call, though." Barratt was in the hall, at the telephone. The two women did not move: Paula Neale sat erect in her deep chair now, her head turned toward the door, listening.

The receiver slammed down "I can't get a thing out of that Japanese woman of hers," Rodney Barratt said impatiently "Just yes, yes, all the time. Marjorie was there some time, but whether yesterday or today she can't seem to make clear. Sylvia's not at home." He was shrugging again into his damp coat. "If the baby's out with her, she wouldn't be staying much later. I'll drive out there and pick up Midge myself."

Polly Neale turned her head, her lips open to shape a question, but she visibly changed her mind "Yes, I'll be back," Barratt said, amused. He did not ask her to go along; she would have no desire, he knew, to visit Sylvia Stevenson.

In his ears echoed the ting of the hall clock, striking half past six.

He took the five miles to the Stevenson mansion west of town at a pace faster than on any of his other visits. The queer sickness in the back of his mind was something that must not be allowed to emerge, except in speed. He thought: "I'll get there and the house will be lighted and warm, and Sylvia mixing me a cocktail in the living room—and Marjorie coloring a book in the corner, the way she's done all those Sunday afternoons."

The memory of those afternoons almost canceled his uneasiness. There was a warmth and ease about them that stayed with him long after he had gone home, and that could easily have become the center of his thoughts, if he had not disciplined himself. Sylvia would sit there with her ratty hair shining and her beautiful body indolently relaxed. She would ask him about the week's work, and he'd tell her—laughing inwardly at himself as he talked, because he knew damn well that she didn't know osteomyelitis from a duodenal ulcer, and didn't care. What Sylvia cared about was how the case had affected him: whether he was elated or discouraged at the progress of treatment, whether he'd thrown off his fatigue after a long operation. She cared about the patients, too, but as human beings and not as cases. Many of them she'd known since kindergarten, and she could supply backgrounds that saved him hours of questioning.

There were some good qualities there, for a doctor's wife. Yes, he'd got as far in his own mind as the word "wife"—and had never yet spoken it to her. Two things kept him silent. Sylvia meant softness and comfort, and perhaps it was too soft, too comfortable. Did it make one a better doctor if one were Spartan, completely and selflessly dedicated to the job? He wasn't sure himself, but the other women he knew—and, needless to say, his patients—seemed to have no doubt that his bed should be hard and narrow.

Here was the last turn in the road. Barratt slackened speed a little, feeling relaxed. Every time he saw Sylvia a sensation of guilt nagged him, yet he couldn't keep away. Lord, that divine kindness of hers! It included lame dogs and odd characters of all descriptions, but it also included him and his Marjorie—Mar-

jorie, who beamed on everybody but who fairly shone with an inner light when she was in Sylvia's presence. And yet Sylvia seldom hugged her and never looked sorry for her, and treated her with a casual comradeship that seemed almost indifferent. Sylvia was what the Barratts needed, all right, but just what did they mean to her? Two more lame dogs? The very indiscriminate quality that made her kindness so endearing gave him the other reason for hesitation.

There was the Stevenson home. Marjorie would be there, he told himself, but as he swung his car up the curving drive, he saw that the house was as dark and still as it had been at five o'clock. He had not rung the bell on that earlier visit. He did so now, impatiently, keeping his finger pressed on it until the shattering peal brought a Japanese woman scurrying from the servants' quarters. Obliquely through the door he could see the big living room, the cold hearth, and nobody there in the shadows.

Five minutes later, Barratt turned away, his square face set in frowning lines. What the Japanese had said was clear enough. Mrs. Stevenson had left for Sacramento on the morning train and would not be back until tonight at eleven. Miss Prager had not been there, Marjorie had not been there since the last time he himself had brought her. That was all.

His pulse rate was going up. The doctor's mind noted it dispassionately, while the man's physical being was shaken by it. Fear, pumping adrenalin into his blood, contracting his stomach muscles: a phenomenon that imagination could produce as well as could an actual occurrence. It must be his imagination. Nothing could have happened to Marjorie. The car slewed into the wet main road, and the dark hills on either side seemed

to pick up speed, to go flying by in long undulant lines. Violet Prager—the stupid, pretty little blonde who had scraped through a business course in Marysville, and whom Sylvia had persuaded him to try out as a relief secretary. Violet didn't have the brains even to learn punctuation, and he'd had to refuse her a recommendation to doctors in the larger towns where she longed to go. Violet wouldn't have the brains to plan a—

His mind balked at the word. He pressed the car faster, seeing the rain-dimmed lights of Red Forks appear ahead of him. There was a mistake somewhere. Marjorie would be at home when he got there, plump and placid and loving hungry for her supper—unless that fool Violet had filled her up on candy and pop. . . .

At the edge of Red Forks he swerved southward, on an impulse. The Pragers lived in a sort of village offshoot of the small town, half a mile beyond one of the encircling hills, an unsavory huddle of houses that were mean without being actually poverty-stricken. The smell of poultry hung about them always, and fences sagged around muddy dooryards. He found the clapboard cottage. He took the steps in one stride and banged peremptorily on the door.

Violet's father opened it. Rodney Barratt scarcely knew him by sight, and had not set eyes on him for months. He looked in surprise at the expression that crossed the unshaven face.

"What d'you want?" Prager said belligerently.

"Is Miss Prager here, please?" Dr. Barratt forced his voice down to cool courtesy.

"She's not. And you can keep away from her." The door began to close.

"Just a moment, Prager," said Barratt without mov-

ing. His tone arrested the man's arm; the door stayed ajar. "I have no personal interest in seeing Violet, but I'm told that she came to my home late today to—take my small daughter riding. Did she bring Marjorie here?"

"No," said Prager shortly. An inner door behind him opened, and a much-frizzed head protruded. His wife joined the conversation, from the length of a hall down which drifted a smell of boiled cabbage. "Vi'let ain't here, and ain't been since this morning, and she's got the car with her. There ain't nobody here but us, Mister Doctor Barratt, and I wonder you got the nerve to show your face to my girl's father and mother."

"I don't know what you mean," Barratt snapped. "If Miss Prager should come in, please have her telephone me at home immediately. It's important. You understand?"

"She won't call you." The older man had grown increasingly surly. "She don't want to get near you, you —"

"Wait a minute, Pa," said Mrs. Prager, advancing in billows down the hall. "Lissen, Doc, somebody's been tellin' you 'ies. Vi'let liked that little girl of yours, sure; she used to talk about her comin' into the office, with them yellow curls and all; but she wouldn't take no little kid ridin' on a rainy night. Vi'let had a date, see? I dunno who with, but she told me it was somethin' about business and she wouldn't be here for supper." She paused, and eyed Barratt with a stony gaze. "We got no reason to feel friendly to you, Doc, but if you're worried about your kid, you got a right to know. She ain't with our girl. What Pa says is straight; Vi'let wouldn't want to get near you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Prager. I can't quite see why she'd feel that way, but—there's no time to discuss it now." He turned away abruptly, the sickness in the back of his mind growing, forcing itself outward. They had spoken the truth, obscure as their references might be. He could usually discern the accents of a liar; and one point was corroborated, the ramshackle car was nowhere in the yard, nor in the crazy open-fronted shelter that served as a garage.

His sedan swept around the hill again, back into town, along Olive Street, Pender Street, Jamieson. There was his own house again, placid, glimmering white among rain-drenched shrubs. There was the porch light, burning with a steady and commonplace glow that belied terror or tragedy. There was the yellow square of the sitting-room window, and a plump figure moving beyond it. His hand turned the knob, and the door with its immaculately curtained glass top swung inward. Marjorie would come running, her words falling over each other as she told him about her adventure. . . .

Through the sitting room door he saw the chair where Polly had been; she must have been reading the bi-weekly Red Forks *Sentinel*, for its pages were scattered on the floor. He went into the room. A wave of pungency met him: spirits of ammonia.

"Doctor Rod," said Mrs. Kushins in a hoarse voice, from where she bent over the old plush couch, "Come here. It's Miss Neale. I was upstairs, and the telephone rung and she took it, and—I heard her fall. She got in here and fell in a dead faint, and it was all I could do to get her up on—"

"Marjorie isn't here yet?" he said quickly, and was

beside the couch before her negative gesture had been completed. "Polly! Polly, you're all right, lie still now, and smell this—a deep breath—"

Paula Neale breathed, choked and coughed. She put up a hand to move a strand of hair from her wet forehead, and her hazel eyes opened wide in a dead white face.

"Get me some brandy, Sade," said the doctor. He sounded matter of fact and unalarmed; that curt bedside manner of his had soothed a hundred terrified patients when the least hint of sympathy would have sent them shrinking again into fear. "All right now, Polly, there's a good girl. Lie down again and don't try to talk."

She did try, though no words came. Her lips seemed to form the word "Must—"

"No, you mustn't." He smiled at her automatically over the terror that crawled in his own en rails. "It can wait two minutes." Her eyes closed; she lay shuddering, visibly trying to pull herself together. Put the afghan over her, Sade.

He turned away, pressing down with every atom of his self-control the need to shout at her. "What was it? Who called? Marjorie—she's dead, she's been hurt?" Under his feet the scattered sheets of the newspaper rustled, and he bent to pick it up, his eyes half consciously taking in an item that occupied the right hand column of the *Sentinel*. In out page.

#### MYSTERIOUS THEFT

Edward Quigley, district "Coroner" and proprietor of Quigley's Furniture Emporium, 224 Olive Street, reported to police this morning that his store had been entered last night and property

taken. The thief gained entry through a door at the rear, which had a defective lock. According to Quigley, the only item stolen was a casket, medium-sized, painted gray, worth \$75.00. The theft was the more mysterious in that nothing else was taken and no other part of the store disturbed. Jim Tyloe, head of Red Forks's efficient police force, had found no clues at a late hour today.

The casket was part of Ed's well chosen and ample stock, kept for prompt and sympathetic service to mourners, in the rear section of Quigley's which adjoins . . .

He stood erect with a scowl as he heard Polly Neale's voice behind him. "Give me another drink, please. I'm—going to be all right now."

She was sitting up on the edge of the sofa, pushing back her hair with a shaking hand. "Rod," she said, "sit down, please. I've got to tell you something."

"She's dead?" He went to a chair, but stood behind it stony faced.

Polly shook her head violently, as if to escape from some unbearable thought. "No, she—no—I don't think so—Rod, it was a man on the phone, a crazy man. He must be crazy. I can't believe anyone would—would—"

Again the automatic smile came on his lips. "Marjorie's alive," he said. "That's something. Now, Polly, no matter how bad it is, tell it to me—from the beginning."

The homely, comfortable room stood about them, serene, in a fantastic contrast to the three shaken persons within it. The flowered paper bloomed on the walls as gaily as it had done an hour ago, the starched net curtains moved in an imperceptible current of air,

the coals glowed under the marble mantel. The couch on which Polly sat bending forward as if in pain was the old red-plush one that had belonged to Alice Barratt's parents in their first home; the tapestry chair into which the doctor's fingernails were digging had been one of his few purchases for the household after he married. One of its broad arms was worn and darkened, where a two-year-old child had discovered an impromptu slide, and had slid regularly day after day for months. The clock ticked in the hall.

Mrs. Kushins, her face colorless and blank, was supporting herself against the end of the couch. Barratt looked at her steadily; looked steadily once more at Polly, who raised hazel eyes to his in a blind gaze.

"He said," she began chokingly, "he said: 'Is the Doc there?' And I said no, it was his secretary, could I take a message?—just as I've said it a thousand times in the office, it comes automatically—and he said: 'Maybe he's looking for his little girl.' I thought—I thought that meant she was safe, and I said yes." She paused, and swallowed. "I didn't know the voice, it was a man's, I think, but far away and sort of muffled, and the telephone did a lot of crackling. Even through that I could hear that he was talking as if he were short of breath. He said—"

She swayed as if she could not go on, and Barratt said sharply: "Come out with it, Polly."

"He said—'Her burial has just taken place. She is with the dead.'"

"Burial?" Barratt repeated dazedly, before the word had gone farther than his ear.

Then the dread that had lain waiting in his mind seemed to burst, to pour over him and envelop his body with a deadly nausea. For a moment the room

was filled with whirling dark spots; the walls plunged in at him and receded.

There was a sharp blow against his ribs as he jerked forward against the chair-back. It brought part of him back to awareness. He gulped for air, pushing himself upright; he heard his own voice croaking words. "Polly, you didn't say—I can't have heard it right—"

"If only I hadn't heard it," she whispered.

Barritt drew in another breath, with a tearing gasp. The portion of him that lived was the doctor's mind, trained to concentrate on the task before him, to operate on a layer of consciousness above any failure of the physical self. His will forced the blurring outlines of the scene to clear. He could see the women again, too distinctly, as if the room's lights had gone up to unnatural brightness in the moment before they were to burn out.

He spoke again, almost without volition. "Tell me what you heard."

Polly licked dry lips, looking up at him haggardly. By some odd trick of his ears her voice sounded different, deeper and muffled, as if the man who spoke to her were now speaking through her, using her as an instrument.

"I said: '*She's dead?*' and he said: 'No, no, not dead. Fast asleep under an opiate, and breathing very lightly, you know. The air should last her for six or seven hours.' He was talking fast and sort of—precisely, as if it were a speech he'd written out, but his breath would catch every so often. I couldn't do anything but repeat words, stupidly, and I said: 'Air?' He said: 'The casket is a large one—for her.'"

"Oh, no, no, *no!*" Mrs. Kushins screamed across the last words. She bent over the end of the couch, ex-

ploding into hiccuping sobs. "No, not my—lamb, my own baby, no—"

Barratt looked at her for a moment, as if he had forgotten she existed. Then, like an automaton, he released his hold on the chair, walked three steps, raised her wobbling head, and slapped her hard. The sounds came with a brutal spat, spat, into the quiet air of the sitting-room. She gulped, and half fell onto the couch, where she sat trembling but silent.

"Go on, Polly," he said in a low voice. "Was there more?"

She looked into the depths of the room behind him, speaking as if she were repeating a lesson. "He said: 'She's not lost, you know. She'll surely be found, some time, but—but perhaps not soon enough.' And then there was a sound, it might have been just the telephone, but it sounded like—a kind of choked back laugh, and—he hung up" At last she lifted her eyes, filled with a mortal sickness.

Rodney Barratt heard her recital as if it were a list of symptoms that added up to a fatal diagnosis. He was in full control of himself now. The blind panic and nausea had been pushed back, back behind a barred door in his mind. The diagnosis might be made for a person whom one loved deeply, but that must not be allowed to shatter one's professional sureness. If there were any action that could be taken, one took it at once; at once, without time for conscious thought.

"Six or seven hours," he said in that lifeless voice that did not sound like his own. He stood swaying a little, his hands hanging at his sides.

"It can't be true, Rod" Polly got shakily to her feet, her words blurring as they tumbled out. "I can't be-

lieve it, I couldn't then, but I hung up the phone without saying anything, and stood there a minute without taking it in, and—then I did, and the walls of the hall began to fall in on me, and that clock—it was striking seven, and it seemed to keep striking on my own head—I got in here, and—” She gestured vaguely toward the floor “I’d just read that news item about Quigley’s, before I answered the telephone. And it—it seemed to—” Her hands covered her face for a moment “I’m sorry to have fainted, it was foolish, it didn’t help—I thought, just before I keeled over, that I had to call the police, but—

“The police? Jim Tyloe said Barriatt in a level, dead tone “Thank God you didn’t

that I *didn’t*—

“Yes. D’you want me to be thwarted, at the very beginning, held back from making a search until there wouldn’t be a hope of getting to her in time?”

“You don’t think Jim Tyloe did this? Why, even if he would—he hasn’t been out of his office this whole afternoon. I could see him. And if that horrible thing should be true—you—Rod, you can’t just stand there and do nothing! I’ve held you up too long already—aren’t you going to get help somewhere—

“I’m thinking. His lifted hand arrested her words. Now there was strength enough in his muscles so that he could get to the table, pour some of the brandy for himself and drink it. You said if that horrible thing should be true, well, there’s a chance that it isn’t, that someone hates me enough to make up a lie like that just to make me suffer. If that’s so, she—Marjorie will be brought back. But we can’t wait to find out if it’s a joke, can we? We have to—to go on the assumption

that someone's hated me so much, for two years or six months or a week, that it's driven him mad. I don't know who. I've got enemies, God knows, and some of 'em might be crazy enough to—to take—" He gave his head a violent shake, and for a moment looked unseeingly about the room. Sade Kushins gave a faint whimper. "If it should be true—" Barratt stopped again and swallowed. "'With the dead,'" he repeated hoarsely. "There's only one place that can mean.—By God, if I have to dig up every grave in the cemetery in the next six hours, by myself, I can do it—if nobody stops me with talk about exhumation orders, and desecration, and 'let's go about this legally and in order.'" He cleared sweat from his forehead with a sleeve. "That's what would happen if you called Tyloe, or Ed Quigley who's the coroner and hand in glove with him, or the mayor who's Tyloe's cousin—or any of the thousand people in town who're connected with 'em."

"Don't be a fool, Rod! By yourself? You think you have so many enemies in town that you can't find a single friend to help you? Why, there are a hundred—"

"I've got friends, maybe. How many of 'em can you name who don't owe money to Quigley Carson's bank, or who'd have the guts to stand up to the family machine that runs this town?"

"I'll name you a dozen to start with," said Paula Neale. "People you've been good to, whose lives you've saved, or who aren't afraid of anything! Jack O'Moyle, and Lucius Bell, and the Strattons, and the Pellegrinis—every one of their clan—and A. J. Foster—" She stopped short.

"Go on," said Barratt grimly. "Want to name some more? 'You know every one of 'em is down in Sacra-

mento at that banquet, anybody you can name who's got that kind of courage!"

"Maybe—" Polly stammered, "maybe *all* the Pellegrinis didn't go. And I know the Reverend Moon, over at the Baptist church, didn't go. You don't have to be a liberal to have courage. Even if he disliked you personally, you think he wouldn't help in a case like this?"

"And keep his mouth shut, so we won't have Merkle on us with a warrant and a blackjack?" He looked at her unbelievably. "Maybe it's worth a try. There's Tim Bittman, too, at the *Sentinel*. Call 'em, Polly, but be careful. I'm going to get started."

"Sade can call them," said Polly in a brittle voice. She went to the hall and snatched up her raincoat and boots. "I'm going with you; I can handle a spade as well as anyone."

Through the archway Rodney glanced at her, and for a moment something flashed between them, the spark that had always been struck from their sharing of work. She came back, shrugging into her coat, and laid a firm hand on Sade Kushins's bowed shoulders. "Mrs. Kushins, look at me. Stop crying, and look up. You call those numbers as fast as you can, do you hear? The *Sentinel*, the Baptist church, any of the Pellegrini brothers. Got that? Get the men; tell them the doctor needs them right away at the cemetery; don't blab the whole story to the women of the families. And after you've done that, get on the telephone again and find out if anyone you know has seen Violet Prager after five o'clock this afternoon. Get hold of her if you can. You've got *work* to do. Have you got that, Sade Kushins?"

Mrs. Kushins gasped once, and nodded. The back

door slammed as Barratt went out on his way to the tool shed, and Polly dragged the older woman to her feet. "It's to save her, we've got to get there in time, and this is all you can do! Now, start!"

She saw the plump hand lift the receiver, heard the quavering voice grow steady as it asked for a number, before she went running out into the driving rain, toward the tool shed.

Rodney Barratt was gathering the pick and the shovels into a big square of canvas, he looked up blindly as Polly came through the shed door. It took him a minute to get his mind into focus again to answer her stammered words something about the hundreds of graves in the old cemetery—how many men they'd need—wouldn't he take the chance and get the whole town out there?—

"You think it's hopeless, don't you?" he said finally, getting to his feet and shouldering the bundle. "We just have to look for the traces that's all. Nobody can have dug a grave without disturbing the sod, and they can't have concealed it completely. The door in his mind was still barred, and if emotion sturd he could ignore it. A physical task such as this with the tools, the foreseen action planned is definitely as he might plan the moves of surgery—of digging and disposing of earth, these were enough for the moment to keep that bar in place. He passed the front porch, and heard Sade Kushins calling from the doorway.

"Doctor Rod, she said as he paused. "I haven't need any of the Pelleginis yet, but the others are gone. Bittman's out of town on a story somewhere, and the Reverend Moon went over to the mines to talk to that poor woman that lost her husband last week—"

"The mines!" Barratt said. "I'm a fool not to have

thought of them! Sade, that'll do it, some of the boys can be there in twenty minutes. Tell 'em to go right to the cemetery, take that old back road, and look for my lights!"

And still in the back of his mind he felt that this haste, this sick strain, were based on nothing tangible, only on a half-dozen sentences that he had not even heard; that he dared not ignore, and yet could not bring himself to believe. He had talked, and planned, and worked with that hope informing him: that it need not be believed. He reached the sedan, opened its rear door and became aware of Polly, leaning half into the front seat, her eyes on something that lay there.

He switched on the dashboard lights, and they looked at it.

It was a child's toy, a Teddy bear that had once been fawn colored and furry, but was now worn threadbare. It lay on its back with a leg bent under it. The black bead eyes caught a gleam of light.

Barratt said: "It's hers. It wasn't here when I went into the house."

He raised his head and met Polly's eyes. She said: "It's dirty, Rod. Sand and black loam."

"That's the graveyard soil," he said, and felt the hope dying within him until there was nothing but an iron heaviness.

She nodded. "Shall I take it in?"

"No," said Barratt in the flat tone that had not changed in half an hour. "Bring it along. She'll want it. She sleeps with it."

For a few seconds longer their eyes held, until he saw Polly flinch from his look. They were unaware of the night that had settled down thickly on the little town, or of the steady rain drenching the car and their

garments. There was only this core of dim light, shining on a toy that had been loved into shapelessness.

Barratt slammed the rear door. 'Get in, Polly,' he said.

III • 8.05 P.M. to 8 10 P.M.

"*Christ, where do we begin?*" Barratt said, and the night and the wind swallowed his words.

They stood on the edge of the uncut grass and weeds and high tombstones, the car behind them—the car that meant the daily round of calls on sane, decent people with sane, everyday ills. But one of those ordinary faces was a mask for hate, for a warped, pitiless mind.

"Damn this rain," Barratt said, his voice dull again. "You can't see ten feet ahead."

He drew a heavy, jagged breath and plunged into the darkness and pale shadows of granite and marble. Then, with Polly's hand on his arm, he caught himself and began walking forward at a sure, steady pace. The girl beside him swept the torch in arcs, pausing wherever a grave seemed mounded.

She stumbled on a wet tangle of weeds and caught Barratt's arm. "Rod," she said, her breath coming sharply, "Rod, I think—up there."

He stopped, the tools going down with a clatter. He turned the cone of his own torch on the glimmer of leaning stone. Earth was a foot high on the grave.

She began laughing, a thin, taut sound, and the light jerked in her hand. "We found it. We just walked in and found it. We just walked—"

"Stop it," he said roughly. He pushed his torch into her free hand and swept up a shovel. It turned clumsily in his hand, and he steadied himself with an effort.

"Put down the torches," he ordered. "Dig, dig!"

She put them down hastily, so that their beams swept across the grave and illumined the big square stone at its head.

ULYSSES S. SMITH—the words sprang out of darkness.



## ULYSSES S. SMITH

*Here lies interred a man of wit  
Who garbed the news in print to fit  
He sought the truth and scoffed the myth  
God rest the soul of U. S. Smith*

THE boys used to tell me: " 'Lyss, with your gift of the gab you'll keep talking after you're dead and buried. Well, they were right, but I'm not the only one. Maybe it's like that in every cemetery. I've got one around me has some sort of story to tell. Me, I like to mumble along the way I used to, about my town. •

You know, it's a curious thing to watch a ghost town come back to life. I can tell you it's a far different thing from watching it die. It's like that poet Eliot said about how the world dies: 'not with a bang, but with a whimper.' And that's the way it is with a town, too. I take a town like this. Back in the old days, when the town was up here by the cemetery, it was a tough-skinned, wide awake mining settlement. There weren't any better diggings than you could find right here in Red Forks, Cal. No, sir! Why, my father told me, come

Saturday night and there'd be over two thousand people crowding the boardwalks. They'd be milling around in that sort of hazy yellow light of the kerosene lamps that would be shining through the saloon windows. I could imagine the look and smell of it—they were still using kerosene lamps when I grew up.

And down there, down by that row of locust trees, that used to be our Main Street, I've heard there would be rows and rows of horses tethered to the posts. I'll bet they sure helped fill the air of a Saturday night, too. Yes sir, those were the days. That was when everyone thought the good old Mother Lode was one long unbroken chain, set with big gold nuggets.

But, of course, it wasn't. The nuggets became smaller and fewer until, by golly, it just wasn't worthwhile digging. Not when you have to sink shafts and build tunnels in the quartz and keep a stamp mill and a hydraulic monitor going. It takes a lot of money and elaborate equipment to work a lode mine. And so, gradually, one by one, the mines around here shut down and the town sort of whimpered away. It was all very gradual, mind you, nothing sudden. But when my dad's paper, the *Red Forks Sentinel*, hit a circulation of only twenty three, brother, we knew this town was dead! Oh, of course, there were some people who've always lived around Red Forks just because they like it, but most of them moved down into the valley. Up here, it was pretty much of a ghost town. The only thing left now is the foundations of the church, and for miles around nothing but abandoned mine shafts and debris from the hydraulic workings. Nothing but desolate, homeless solitude.

But look at the new Red Forks, down there in the valley. Doesn't look dead to you, does it? Of course, you

can't see any kerosene lamps lighting up saloon windows any more. But there are plenty of neon lights and cocktail bars and juke boxes. We've got our own fire company, our own bank, hotel, and we have fire crackers and parades on the Fourth of July. All in all, I'd say it's a pretty lively town.

Yes, su. Red Forks, Cal., may have died with a whimper, but she sure came back to life with a bang. And do you know what did it? I'll tell you. We went off the gold standard. That's what did it. The United States went off the gold standard and the price of gold was hiked up. That's what put life back into this town. The mines were reopened and gee! it was a pretty sight to see that smoke begin to rise from old stacks of hillside workings. I'll never forget that year. It was back in '34, about ten years before I took a permanent lease on this here plot. Why, in just one year that nice little town a few miles down there in the valley was a new place. And a nice home town too, with the big trees and the old frame houses left over from the eighties to give it a kind of permanent feeling.

I tell you it's a gratifying thing to watch a town come back to life. Of course there are some who might say that my gratification didn't spring from unselfish motives. And, considering that I was the sole owner and editor of the *Red Forks Sentinel* maybe I did have more than an ordinary interest in seeing this town grow. But even if it hadn't meant that the circulation of the paper was going up, I'd still be kinda pleased to see this town built up. I've lived here all my life and I think it's a pretty good town. Naturally like with any group of people, you're bound to come across somebody now and then who's a little out of line, and you're bound to find some friction and flare ups, like in a

family quarrel. As a matter of fact, Red Forks folks are nothing but a great big family. Somebody always turns out to be a cousin to almost everybody else in town. I figure that I, myself, must have been related to nearly two thirds of the whole danged population. And like all families, we've got our little skeletons we're not too keen on showing off. But, all considered, it's a pretty good town.

And the Red Forks *Sentinel* is a pretty good newspaper. Seeing as I was the editor and owner I might be a little prejudiced, but I still say it's a pretty good newspaper. Yes, sir. And there's a lot to knowing how to run a small town newspaper. A lot more than you'll ever learn in a journalism class down at Berkeley. Wonder how young Tim Bittman made out as my successor. You see, it isn't only knowing what to print that counts around here. It's mostly knowing what not to print. Yes, I imagine that a lot of folks around here never even suspected how many of their secrets weren't hidden as closely as they thought. Not that I didn't keep them to myself. Mind you, I never was one for airing anybody's dirty linen for someone else to gawk at. And there's been plenty of dirty linen in my day. But I could keep my mouth shut and my ears open. Actually, in the long run, that's the kind of policy that's best because people don't stay mad. Not around here, they don't. You probably know yourself that today's son-of-a-bitch can become tomorrow's prodigal son. Why, I remember the time you could take a dig at a Tyloc and have plenty of Quigleys back you up—that is, until Nancy Tyloc married Ed Quigley. And look at Jim Tyloc now. Chief of police, he is, and got the place pretty much under control. The mayor is his cousin. Quigley is his brother-in-law, to say nothing of

the other important people around here who are some sort of cousins.

All this—I suppose you might call it inbreeding—makes for good solid family feeling, which is a good thing, I guess. But, on the other hand, I'm not so sure about that. Mind you, I'm not saying we've got a Jukes family here. There may be a few mildly nutty people in this town, but I don't think they'd be really dangerous. Just the same, it'd be better all around if we had some new blood brought in.

That's one of the reasons I was kinda pleased to see all these new young people move in. There's Sylvia Stevenson—of course, she's not really a new person around here. But, she'd been away ever since she got married, and with her family not here any more, she's almost like a stranger. And there's that young Dr. Barratt, Dr. Rodney Barratt, who set up his practice here. He's an outsider, but he married a town girl, the Corbin girl. Alice Corbin. Nice couple they make. And there's that nice young woman, the doctor's secretary. Now what is her name—oh, yes, Polly Neale. She's new to Red Forks, too. And so is Tim Bittman. That's a lot of new people for around here. Sure do wonder how they made out.

Yes, sir, new blood. That's what this town needed. Not that it isn't a pretty good little town, as is. I don't hold a grudge against a soul in it, except maybe the fellow who sold Pa this lot in the cemetery. But I kinda like to see young people moving in. Besides, there's always the circulation of the Red Forks *Sentinel* to be considered.

## THE MARBLE FOREST

IV • 8 15 P M to 8 35 P M

POLLY straightened up, the shovel falling from her hand. She steadied herself against the tombstone.

It's so hard. Rod, the earth—

His breathing was labored. Pick. Have to use—pick. For a moment something took possession of him. He found himself slashing crazily at the hard earth.

Polly had taken up one of the torches. This isn't it. He heard her voice faintly. Rod listen to me. This can't be it.

Barratt's pick went on cutting at the earth as if under its own power, until she turned the light full in his face. He blinked, crouching forward and shook his head. Not it.

Look, she said, turning her light along one side of the wounded grave. The side was cut away cleanly, was even underneath; bits of rock and pebbles were embedded in the surface.

The grave hasn't been touched for years. It's the rap—

He let the pick fall and stared. Er—son, he said slowly. It's cut away the sides. He moved back, picked up his own torch and snapped on its light. I've got to keep calm, he said half audibly, beginning to gather the tools. I lost control for a minute there. It won't get us anywhere. Better be methodical. Think. Plan.

His voice steamed with the last words.

If we only had some idea who it is, Polly said. If we knew who could have done it, we could think where he'd—he'd put Marjorie.

Barratt gave a sort of laugh, furious, frustrated. "There's Hummel," he said, "or Doc Whittleby, or—there are at least four good, upright citizens near enough to that, full of hate, full of sadism, on the borderline. No, that's useless. We couldn't follow his thinking. Not a diseased mind like his."

"But if we knew we could eliminate—he wouldn't be likely to disturb his own family's graves, would he?"

"That doesn't help much, not the way the town's interrelated. And how do we know he wouldn't? Maybe it would be one more warped pleasure for him."

A gust of rain-heavy wind lashed them, and Polly shivered.

Barratt's gaze turned back in the direction of the car. "How long have we been here?" he said. "Someone ought to have come by now don't you think? It's not so damn far as all that from the mine."

"They'll come, Rod. They'll come."

"You don't suppose they'd—turn me down, Polly?"

"No, no!" she said quickly. "Maybe Sade's call was delayed."

"The town people I could have called on, all off at that dinner—of all the hideous bad luck—" He stopped, looking into space. "Maybe it wasn't luck. Maybe that's why tonight was—was chosen for—"

"Wait," she said. She swung her torch in an arc. "What was that?"

The cone of light pushed out a little way into the darkness, into the wilderness of headstones. A few rain drops glittered in the beam.

"Nothing," he said. "Just wind in the trees."

She turned slowly, the light reaching into the blackness, shadows crawling where the light died.

"We've got to begin somewhere," she said, and the beam of the torch wavered

Deliberately, Rodney Barriatt thought *'I am not looking for a buried child I am beginning a long exploratory operation I will blot out of my mind, for the next five hours, any personal feelings They must go back behind that barred door My hand shall be steady'*

Decision was in his voice and in his movements, taking up the tools "There's nothing to do but cover every inch of ground We'll go back to the edge of the graveyard, work around the circumference keep working in, covering every bit of ground every grave, tightening the circle until we reach dead center We'll find her We'll work fast and we'll be in time Help or no help, we'll be in time We've got to be in time

They reached the screen of evergreens at the edge of the graveyard Now, he said, shifting the shovels and pick cradling them in his left arm We'll use both torches they'll last four hours at least You cover the area on your left I'll take the right

She took her place beside him "I don't think it was just the wind," he murmured  
 e They moved forward slowly into steady rain into darkness that opened before them and closed in behind, into the expanse of gravestones that stood out like tortured signposts in a nightmare They went past the Elloe mausoleum with a long strand of wistaria vine grown across its padlocked door and an unmarked path leading to it

The graveyard was still Their footsteps were deadened by the wet carpet of grass and leaves and weeds; even the rain fell softly and the sound of the wind in the trees was a whisper Only the clunk of shovel on

shovel and the man's heavy breathing were loud; abnormal sounds that did not belong in the night, among the graves.

"Rod," she whispered, "I'm thinking—or I'm trying to think, and I can't. We've been helpless, Rod, ever since the telephone call. We've been doing just what he wanted us to do, just what he planned."

Barriatt moved on steadily, his eyes on the moving beam of light, on the graves. "It's your nerves. Nerves, Polly."

"And he could be watching us now, could have followed us. He could be anywhere out there in the darkness, gloating over us, knowing we'd never find—"

The words were torn from Barriatt's throat. "For God's sake, Polly! We've got to go on. It's our only chance."

But he stopped, letting the tool drop on his aching left arm. He stood, staring out into the darkness.

"Damn him," he said, his voice a whisper. "Of course he's out there, with his twisted mind. He wouldn't be home imagining this torture, not when he could be out there watching us, laughing at us—that's part of it."

Polly's head was turned, her eyes looking back over the way they had just come. She said simply, "Turn off your torch, Rod." Her own light winked out.

He swung round to follow her gaze, far back, where darkness was thick, a shadow seemed to blot out the pale white of marble and then be swallowed up behind a gray shadow of granite. He rubbed his hand over his eyes, straining into the darkness.

She moved closer to him. "Did you see it too?"

"Yes." His body was tightening, ready for the chase.

Her fingers tightened on his arm. "No. No. Rod. We'd only lose time. It may be nothing, it may be the

strain—that we're imagining things. And we could never catch him here. We can't waste thirty minutes, an hour, hunting shadows." •

He wavered. "You're right, of course." He switched on his torch again and took up the tools.

They began moving forward, their lights fumbling in the night. The wind had shifted, was behind them now. And now it carried a sound, a far away, muffled sound, twisted and broken on the wind.

"That's someone laughing," Barratt said, not lifting his eyes from the ground. "Didn't you hear it?"

"Yes, I heard it," she said. She said the lie carefully: "It was only the wind in the pines."

**V • 8.35 P.M. to 8.45 P.M.**

THE laughter, real or imagined, could no longer be heard; but they had gone only a few yards farther before they knew beyond doubt that there was another living being in the cemetery. There it was—hardly ten feet ahead—another of those two legged shadows. This one as still as the marble angel yet unmistakably different. . . .

Barratt held out his hand to stop Polly and pointed. "Dr. Whittleby," she whispered.

In a pause between gusts the air was still. The pines hiding Barratt's car straightened—no taller, across the

square stumps and pointed shafts of the marble forest, than the man hunched beside the canvas-covered hole that would be his son's grave. It didn't seem possible that anything so rigid could have made that fleet man-shadow among the tombstones. Now, rain was the only thing that moved.

What was the old doctor doing here—*tonight*? His son's body wasn't here. The sealed coffin that enclosed it was to come in on an early morning train, in time for tomorrow's ceremonies.

And yet—Barratt, about to lunge forward, hesitated. There was a possible explanation. Old Dr. Whittleby for the past month had been galvanized into abnormal activity, and to a strength like that of a man in his fifties. He had taken to coming here constantly, even walking those miles alone if no one would drive him—coming to the cemetery to gaze at the headstone that he had put up three years before over a plot of earth where no one was buried. Barratt realized, with a crisping of his nerves, that the old man must think of the grave as if it had never been empty, as if the true substance of his son lay not in an object shipped from overseas, but in the carved name on a headstone.

Maybe he was right, at that; and yet—if one believed in any of that nonsense about restless spirits, one couldn't help wondering where Philip Whittleby's was now—on the train just starting up the valley from San Francisco, or—outpacing wheels, outpacing thought, finding itself home at last?



S A C R E D  
to the  
M E M O R Y  
of  
**PHILIP WHITTLEBY, M.D.**

*Dulce et decorum est  
pro patria mori*

YOU know how it is when you sleep late on Sunday morning? You wake up for a second, just long enough to realize you don't have to, and doze off again; and after a while you stir, and roll over, and maybe open one eye and wonder if you could get up just long enough to close the blinds without really waking up, but you're afraid to risk it; and you go on like that, wavering on the thin line between waking and sleeping, for a long time. And then you get an uneasy feeling. People stirring around, and talking. You don't know what time it is, but it must be late. You wish the people would quiet down and let you sleep. . . .

It's that way with me now. Just like that.

It hasn't been like that all the time. I think I must have been left alone for quite a long time, after it happened; or maybe I was just numb. I don't know. I don't remember much about that (Only one thing,

clearly: the cow. The tow plane had already cut us loose, and we didn't have much altitude when we were hit. All of a sudden there was a loud *whoosh!* and then there was just a big hole where the back of the cabin had been. We nosed straight over, the lot of us hanging forward in our belts like people in a roller-coaster. Nobody yelled much; we were strung up so tight that we were calm. Through the nose I could see these cows, minding their own business in the middle of a war, and one brown and white one especially. The glider began to whipsaw; each time that cow came into sight it was bigger. "You stupid bastard, get out of the way," I remember saying out loud. We missed it, though I think we missed it).

Funny I should remember that, when all I can remember about the months in England is that they were fun. There was a girl I was in love with, and I've forgotten her name. That's what I'd like to be thinking about, things like that, not Red Forks. When I was alive I had a convenient memory, like most people; it worked fine on things I had enjoyed and didn't bother me with the things I wanted to forget. Seems to be different now. I've got an uncomfortable feeling that they may be taking me back to Red Forks. It's the kind of grotesque gesture my father would make. That might account for the way my mind keeps fumbling around among those old memories, like someone groping among the clutter of a dark attic and taking things one by one to the light of the window, and recognizing them with a rush of recollections.

I wouldn't be thinking about my father by choice. Nobody has to tell me it's all wrong for a man to hate his father; I know it. But I do—or, rather, I guess I

should say I did. The grave is a quiet place, they say—those people who've never been in one—where there isn't any loving or hating. All right, then; I don't hate my father; but I did when I was alive.

Not always, of course. When I was a kid, I was like any other kid; I took things as they were. I thought I didn't especially mind not having a mother, simply because I had never had one. If pinned down, I might have worked it out that I envied other boys their mothers in the same way, and about as much, as I envied Steve Allen's having his own horse. Maybe not that much. After all, I had Mrs. Steubert, who kept house for us. She cooked, and made me wash, and harped on my manners; those were the observable functions of a mother.

And I took my father as he was, too. He was just there, a fact. He let me alone, and I let him alone. I think perhaps I did envy the other kids in that, a little. Their fathers took them hunting or fishing once in a while; mine didn't. Still, we had one of the biggest houses in town. It was old, and the Shacks had crowded pretty close to it since its best days, but the curving drive and the pillars of the portico were still impressive. And when I was a kid plenty of families had no car, but we always had a new one at least once a year. That was because my father was a doctor. Another advantage of his being a doctor was that I could smuggle my friends into the house when he was making his calls, and sometimes he would have left the door of his office unlocked; then we could lie on the floor and pore over the pictures in his medical books, going hot and cold.

I was about thirteen, I guess, the time Mrs. Steuben caught us doing that. She didn't rant or rave; she never

did; I remember Joey Crain called her The Great Stone Face. She just took the book away and herded us out of the office and locked the door. "I shall tell Doctor," she announced. I knew she would do it, too.

He had office hours from six thirty to eight in the evening. I was supposed to be in bed by eight and that was one night I was planning to make it; but Mrs. Steuben stopped me on the stairs. "Doctor wants to see you," she said in her frozen way. "Okay, okay, think I don't know it?" I grumbled, and sat down on the stairs.

It was after eight thirty when he came into the hall and looked up at me. We still had a gas chandelier in the hall, with colored glass pendants, and it made a harsh light on his nearly bald, bony skull and flared in his old-fashioned glasses that had a black ribbon dangling to his lapel. He was tall and gaunt at that time; there were deep, hard parentheses around his mouth. Soon after that he began to stoop, and the parentheses lost their identity in a network of wrinkles, but he was still strong then.

I might as well admit it, I was scared to death of him.

"I want to talk to you," he said.

He went back into his office without looking to see whether I was coming or not. I thought briefly, but not really seriously, of running away; then I straightened my shoulders and marched stiffly down the stairs, and into his office.

He was sitting at his desk, and now the light on his face was upward, reflected by some papers from the glare of a student's gooseneck lamp. It made him look evil. He nodded at the chair across from him and I had to sit there, as if I were a patient, with that glare on

my face too. He leaned back and his face went out of the light and vanished, all but the gleam of his eyes and glasses. For a while he just sat there without speaking and without taking his eyes off my face. I might have been a stranger; to me, he seemed like one.

Finally he turned his chair and unlocked a cabinet that we had never been able to investigate, and took down a book. He flipped the heavy pages; they made a whirl like the wings of a beetle. He found what he wanted and slid the book across to me under the lamp, his thin clean finger holding it open. "Maybe this picture will interest you," he said.

I don't want to remember this. I was trying to shut it out of my mind while it was happening, and afterwards I did shut it out for years—until I was in medical school, and came across that same book in the library. By that time, though, the pictures didn't bother me. I'm not so sure it was the pictures even then. After all I was a country kid, there wasn't much anyone could have told me about sex, and I knew what women looked like, I'd climbed onto the roof of the gym with the other kids to peek through the skylight into the girls' locker room when they had a night basketball game. No, I think it was the trembling rigidity of that bony finger, prodding at the pictures of what disease left behind; it was the muttering, over and over. "Women? Getting interested in women, are you? Want to look at women, do you?"

And most of all it was the end of that chamber-of-horrors session, when he slammed the book shut and stood towering over me, poor skinny kid shrinking into a chair that I was and said: "I want you to remember this, Philip. Every time you look at a woman; every time you feel yourself slipping into that rotten mess we

call sex; every time you start thinking some girl is pretty, I want you to think back and remember these pictures. Remember them! That's women for you, Philip, that's women with their pretty clothes and their pretty tricks torn off, that's women and that's what they do to men—!"

And then a very queer thing happened. Just a minute ago I was saying how little it mattered to me that I didn't have a mother. I meant it, too; or anyhow the kid I was thought he meant it. And yet, cringing in that chair under my father's bitter hate, something inside me that I hadn't even known was there turned on him, and I heard myself cry out in a desperate sob: "My mother wasn't like that!"

The sound of my voice shriveled me. It stopped him. He backed away from me, his face white. "Who's been talking to you about your mother?" he whispered.

The spark in me was dying fast, but it burned long enough for me to whimper: "I don't want to look at your old pictures. I want a picture of my mother."

That was the end of it. He had pulled himself together and he came at me, hauling me up off the chair by my bony shoulders and shaking me and laughing and roaring at me. "A picture of his mother, he says! Who's been talking to you, tell me that, you little sneak? Who's been talking to you, hey?"

"Nobody, nobody!" I howled, and fell apart inside. I really, don't remember any more of that.

Two things came out of that pretty little session. I got an obsession about having a picture of my mother, for one. That was what I searched for on rainy afternoons, after that. I never found one; he had made sure of that; but once, when I'd pestered Mrs. Steuben beyond

endurance, she told me why. "She had another son—and it wasn't his," she muttered in my ear, and never said any more. Years later, when I was in medical school, I found an alumni directory that listed my father and gave his wife's maiden name and the date of the marriage. It wasn't a Red Forks name. I went through the newspaper files in Detroit, where they had been married, and found a paragraph but not the picture I had hoped for, nor the relatives' names. I didn't give up, I would have found something if I had lived long enough, I just didn't have time. Instead I had to make out with a picture I cut from a magazine, some hack artist's sketch of a motherly woman, which happened to match my boyish ideas. I still had that clipping in my wallet that day over Normandy. I wonder if they sent it to my father, and what he thought of it?

The other thing was going to medical school. Of all the ideas my father had in mind when he showed me those pictures, I'm sure that getting me interested in medicine wasn't one, and yet that's the way it worked. The pictures revolted me, all right, but they made me want to take care of people so they wouldn't have to look like that. The crusader phase, maybe, but it stayed with me.

Not that my father objected to my being a doctor. In fact one of the few times I can remember feeling a warmth in him, a human spark, was the night of my high school graduation when he asked me, on the way home in the car, what I thought I was going to do next. That will give you an idea of the terms we were on, we had never discussed it. So I mumbled "Medical school, I guess. Pre med, I mean."

He turned half around—Mrs. Steuben was in front

with him, I was in the back by myself—and then caught himself and turned front again. All he said was: "Well!" But I knew from his voice that he was pleased. There was a touch of warmth, as I said. Pride, too. He was pretty proud of having been Red Forks's only doctor for so long, I guess it pleased him that there would be another Dr. Whittleby there for another thirty years or so. Maybe he's a good guy underneath, I thought; how would I know? And I suddenly had a warm, kindly feeling for him too. I sat back there grinning to myself, embarrassed, trying to think of something else to say quick before the moment was gone; but I couldn't. I didn't know how.

I wasn't home much the next few years. Summers I followed the threshing crews. I didn't need the money, I will admit he never stinted me that way, but I had always been skinny and I had an idea I should toughen myself up. Then the summer after my B.S. I went down through Mexico and the West Indies with a friend who was going on to medical school with me, and had a lot of fun. I guess we knew the war was coming, but we didn't worry about it. I did come home for my first Christmas holidays, and for say a week each summer, but the atmosphere was so bleak I grabbed at any chance to be somewhere else.

I could see my father changing, seeing him at those long intervals. He had never been what you could call a broad-gauge man, and as the years went by his mind and energy dug their rut deeper and narrower all the time. It appalled me to see the venom in him if our rare conversations happened to touch on women; I learned to avoid that. I knew that some of his patients followed the old custom of bringing their children to

him for instruction when they reached puberty, or were planning to be married; I used to wonder what he told those kids, and how they ever dared to get married.

And don't forget I was changing too. I was growing up. I had gone through a few bad times, and made a few girls pretty mad at me, before I got rid of all the effects of what he had tried to make me believe about them. I did, though. I'm glad I had that last couple of years, I'm sorry they weren't longer.

And then there was my last trip home. It was right after my graduation from medical school. I had my internship appointment, a good one, if I wanted it, and to be honest I felt that I needed it. They had been racing their motors a bit in medical school, and I had been hustled out in late Fall, that was in '43, suspecting that there might still be one or two things I didn't know about medicine. The Army wasn't critical of that, but they were dubious about my eyes. Organically my eyes were sound, but they had an annoying habit of watering when they were tired; so the Army had sort of pigeon-holed me as acceptable but not essential. In other words I could make up my own mind. What I wanted was someone to make it up for me.

I came home in that spirit. When I had been away for a long while I used to build up a sneaking hope that next time it would be different, next time my father and I could get through whatever the barrier was and really talk. He hadn't come down for my graduation, had been ill; I hadn't seen him since Easter; so the hope had had a chance to get fairly substantial, especially because there was really something to talk about.

But even before I reached the house the hope was dying on the vine. The bus was a half hour behind

schedule; that didn't matter because I had come without letting my father know, with some vague idea of catching him off guard. While I waited for the driver to dig out my two bags I looked along the quiet, shady street. Mrs. Steuben, in her rare stiff notes, had been complaining that the town was being spoiled by all the scum who had come to the district to work in the Sun Queen mine. There wasn't any gold being mined, of course, but the Sun Queen was rumored to have something very hush-hush in its ore. Red Forks, according to Mrs. Steuben, was aswarm with people; that new doctor, name of Barratt, who had married the Corbin girl, was using the boom as a chance to get a foothold and try to cut Doctor out

But the street looked much the same to me. Jim Tyloe was drowsing in front of the police station, tilted back in the same old straight chair. There was a new chain grocery where Sam Rayburn's used to be, but the other stores seemed to be unchanged. No swarm of strange faces on the sidewalks, no bustle, nothing but the pleasant peace and quiet of a late fall afternoon.

I threw my bags in the back seat of Joe Clancy's tired old cab and climbed in beside him. He woke up with a start and looked me over. "Hi, Phil," he said. "Didn't see you around this week. Been away?"

This was a standard joke and I gave it back to him in kind. "See you've got a new cab, Joe. Think these self-starters will amount to anything?"

He grinned. "Mine works fine." He proved it, and we began to chug down the street. "How's tricks?"

"Can't complain," I said.

"How long before the draft board catches up with you? They let you finish learning your doctoring, you think?"

"Finished last week."

"Hell you say! Well, now! Figure to hang out your shingle here?"

"Well, I'm not sure," I admitted.

"Better do that, if the Army can spare you," he said. "Time your old man took it easy. Guess you heard he's got competition."

"I did hear that," I said. "What's he like? Good man?"

Joe shrugged. "Some say this and some say that. You know me—can't afford to take sides."

"Being a common carrier," I said obligingly.

"I carry 'em, and some of 'em sure are common," he said as expected, and waited while I laughed. "Oh, there's enough trade for both of 'em, I guess. Old-timers still swear by your pop, but Doc Barratt gets most of the business from all them hunkies over at the Sun Queen camp."

"I heard there were a lot of new people. Town doesn't look crowded, though."

"Well, they live in sort of barracks, and they got their own boarding-house and store and such. Don't see much of them during the week. Saturday night, though—zowie!"

"Bunch of cut-ups?"

"Cuttin' each other up." He slapped the wheel and guffawed. "Cuttin' each other up, got to remember that. Yep, Doc Barratt's kep' busy that night—means some business for Ed Quigley too, often enough."

I whistled. "That bad? Looks as if Jim Tyloe'd need some help."

"Oh, he's got Joe Merkle for a deputy now. Yep, there's some changes, all right. . . . 'D you know Johnny Swanholm got killed?"

"No!" I said. I remembered him sharply, a tall shy kid I had liked. "In action, you mean?"

He nodded. "One o' them places in China, or somewhere out there. Well, what I always say, you shoot off enough guns somebody's gonna get killed."

"Don't go up the drive," I said. We had reached the house. "I'll get out here."

"Just as you say," he said. "Surprise the old man, hey? . . . Six bits now, Phil." He looked at me defensively.

"Oh, sure," I said, and gave him another quarter.

"Everything costs more, seems like. Well, give my regards to Doc, hey?"

"Sure," I said again, and turned to face the house.

I left my bags on the porch and went into the waiting-room, to avoid running into Mrs. Steuben first. It was the middle of afternoon office hours, and in the old days the benches would have been crowded, but I was alone there. I could hear a low mumble of voices from the consulting-room, so I sat down, picking up a *Reader's Digest* and wondering what doctors had put on their fumed oak reception-room tables before the *Digest* and the *National Geographic* started.

In a little while the office door opened and Donna Parks came out backwards. I heard my father's voice. "That's absolutely all I can do for you, Donna," he was saying. My heart sank; his voice was vindictive. "More than I should do. Remember, I told you one tablet at bedtime. They're very strong. If you should—accidentally, take four or five you'd quietly go to sleep and never wake up."

There was a brief silence. I started to get up, feeling cold.

"And never wake up," she whispered in a dreary little voice that didn't go with the pretty, sparkling Donna I remembered.

"But I told you just one, didn't I?" my father said.

She nodded dumbly and turned toward the street door. Then she saw me. I forced a smile and said: "Hi, Donna! Surprise!"

She tried to smile too, I could see her trying, but it was a pretty poor effort. She huddled her coat close around her, almost furtively, and gulped and said: "Why, hello, Phil. I didn't know you were back."

"It's a secret," I said. "Don't tell the Army, they—"

And then my father spoke from the doorway. "Go straight home, Donna," he said harshly. "And don't forget what I told you."

She nodded again, and gave me a little wave and said: "See you later, I guess," and went out.

I looked at my father, and waited hopelessly for him to say something pleasant and welcoming, but I should have known. Finally I said: "What's the matter with Donna?"

He gave that barking snort that went for a laugh. "Sweet little Donna. They run true to form, these darling little girls, don't they?"

I didn't ask him what he meant. I didn't want to hear it.

It was the next morning, early, that I saw my father for the last time.

We were having breakfast. I heard the street door burst open and a man stalked into the hall and then into the dining room. I'd never seen him before. Once his eyes fastened on my father they stayed there; he

came to the table and slammed down a cardboard pill box. It jumped open and it was empty.

The man leaned over with his hands on the table and said: "I'm going to get your license, Whittleby."

My father leaned back, quite calm, and said: "Have you met my son, Dr. Barratt?"

Barratt didn't even look at me. "I've helped patients to die," he said. "Every doctor has. But I never deliberately killed one. You did."

"I hope you're listening closely, Philip," my father said.

Barratt straightened up. "That's all. I'm reporting to the County Medical Society this morning." He started out.

"Just a minute." My father stood up. "It would be nice to know just what the devil you think you're talking about."

Barratt turned. "I'm talking about Donna Parks. I've been trying to save her since one o'clock this morning; she died half an hour ago. It would have been less trouble for everybody, Whittleby, if you'd given her a gun."

My father's voice remained steady, but I saw his hand trembling on the back of his chair. I was numb, myself. "I see," my father said. "She took an overdose? That's the basis for your hysteria? Perhaps it's fortunate that my son was present when I cautioned her about that. You remember, Philip?"

I don't know whether I said anything or not, but in any case Barratt still didn't look at me. "I'm sure you did. I'm sure you told her you couldn't or wouldn't abort her but you'd give her something for her nerves. And did you tell her her troubles would be over if she

took more than one? Save it for your hearing, Whittleby." The door slammed behind him.

I signed up for a commission that morning. My father made out an affidavit about what I had heard him tell Donna; I signed that too. Then I left.

They didn't take away his license, but it was a close call. When they didn't, the story got around that it was really Dr. Barratt's fault that Donna died and that he was only trying to pass the buck when he brought charges. I felt rotten about that. There wasn't anything I could do when I heard about it, in England, but I made up my mind that after the war or anyhow after my father was dead, I'd straighten people out on that.

But of course I didn't figure on D-Day.

## THE MARBLE FOREST

VI • 8.45 P.M. to 9.20 P.M.

THERE it was. An open grave— and the old man standing beside it as if on armed guard.

Barratt gripped Polly's arm. "The canvas— If that hole's not empty—"

"Of course, Rod." Her voice was even lower than his. "Or maybe underneath—covered up to look like the bottom of any newly dug grave."

His laboratory-trained eyes weighed the piles of dirt, runnelled mud now, on each side.

She shook his arm. "No, there'd be less dirt. That's the right amount there always is for a grave. Don't you remember Alice's, and Donna Parks's and— Oh, well, I know it is. Look, Rod; what he'd do is dig the bottom deeper and put back that dirt so it wouldn't look different on top."

"You're keeping your head, Polly. I'm not." His mouth set harder. "We've got to get him away."

The figure in front of them stirred. As if his motion were a signal to the wind, the bushes behind him were suddenly strained back and then roughly snapped forward. The trousers about his scarecrow legs began to flap, and the drums and bassoons and the screeching violins of the storm resumed their play.

As Barratt started forward the man facing the taut canvas suddenly threatened the sky with both fists.

Polly caught Barratt's sleeve. "He hates you so. He'll never let you—"

Spade and pick clanked together. "Then you'll have to do it."

She looked down at her own spade.

He snatched it. "And hurry! Tell him anything. Just get him away from that hole!"

"She stepped forward so quickly that she stumbled and caught at the old doctor's coat. Whittleby turned. Not last, Barratt noticed. He didn't act startled. . . . Because he already knew they were here?"

"Oh, doctor, I'm so glad to see you!" Polly sounded near hysteria. "Won't you please take me home?"

"Take *you* home?" Surprise showed now, in his voice. "You haven't come for me?"

"I—" She paused and looked up. "You doctors always stick together. But I'm going to tell you. Dr. Barratt asked me to make a call with him, and then—I had to

get out of his car. I started to walk and was taking a short cut through the cemetery. You've no idea how glad I am to see you. You'll drive me back to town, won't you?"

"Barratt!" The word exploded into the wind. "That --stud-horse! He's wrecked all the work I've done in this town--tried to wreck me professionally--killed my son. If Barratt hadn't moved in on my practice Philip would have been deferred to finish his internship. He wouldn't have been in the invasion. He wouldn't be coming home now--in a coffin."

"Take me back to Red Forks, doctor," Polly urged. "It's such an awful night, and I may run into Dr. Barratt again on the road."

"Oh, God!" Barratt thought, "*they stand talking, talking--*" Time was running away like those rivulets of water on raw earth, and yet while the old man was there the search could not begin. And where, for Christ's sake, were the men from the mines?

"Think of his trying to get my license! That upstart! As if I'd give that worthless Parks girl an overdose--That stud-horse!" the old doctor snorted again. "All the years I've worked here to get people out of the gutter--then that--that stallion comes along, lets loose the filth. . . . All my work gone. . . . Now they're all back to being animals again. When I think of Alice Corbin--pure Alice Corbin, untouched till he--"

Barratt gripped the pick and spades harder. He'd run into the results of Asa Whittleby's proselytizing all over Red Forks, even in his own home and bed. . . .

The old man's hands were working. In the murky night they fanned out and closed at his sides like the fins of a trout. "What do you have to follow me for,

Myrtle Young? You call yourself my housekeeper—as if anybody could fill Kate Steuben's shoes! You think you're pretty big, cooking my meals and washing my clothes. Big enough to lock up my car and put sleeping pills in my coffee. 'Think I don't know phenobarbital when I taste it?' His voice had turned querulous. Up to now there'd been no tremor evident in voice or body though the old doctor went about town with his head always shaking.

He peered down into Polly's face. "I'm not helpless. Don't fool yourself. You nor anyone else can stop me when I make up my mind to do something. Barratt's trying to get me the way he got Philip. But I'll show him! I'm Asa Whittleby, the best doctor Red Forks ever had—and my son's come home at last."

Christ, how could they get him away from that grave? All his warped, bitter life coming up in his senile wanderings like vomit. Senile? Was Whittleby senile? If he wanted to fake he'd know what to do. The palsy, for instance . . . But he'd had a kid of his own; could he take another man's child—? He might not be senile, he might be psychotic. Then a child might not mean the same thing. . . .

Old Whittleby reached for Polly's shoulders. "Listen, Myrtle Young." Again his voice had stopped shaking. "I brought you into this world. I brought all the Youngs—you and all your brothers and sisters—into this world. And I can send you out of it—if you give me reason."

Polly gasped and Barratt dropped his tools. As he straightened she lurched backward, the old man's arms outflung as if he'd pushed her. "Now get out! Get out of here! Quick!"

Rodney sprang to steady her and made his voice as

casual as if he'd met a professional acquaintance on the street. "Good evening, doctor. Bad night to be out."

Whittleby showed no more surprise at Barratt's appearance than he had at Polly's, but his wild bravado vanished. As he said: "My son's home," he seemed pathetic.

"Where's your car, doctor?" Barratt asked crisply.

"My son's home," the older man repeated. "Home—where he belongs."

"Where we all belong, a night like this." Rod put a hand on the other's arm.

He felt a gathering of muscles as hard as those of a man of forty before Whittleby jerked away. "My son would have been here now—if you hadn't taken his place."

"War's a bad business, doctor. Where's your car?"

"He'd have carried on my work. I'd have lived on then—part of me—another generation of my teaching—my son—my plans . . ."

"Those things are hard" Barratt motioned Polly around to the old man's other side.

"It was your doing!" Whittleby shouted in the younger man's face. "You drove him to his death—you and your charges of malpractice!" He whirled on Polly. "Let go of me, young woman!"

But Barratt knew now the strength in that long scarecrow body. He clamped down with both hands on the lean arm next to him. "Time to go, doctor. We'll take my car." Tie him in it if they had to.

Whittleby made another of his abrupt changes. Docile now, he allowed both arms to be held, and they all started off together linked in seeming affection.

As three feet came down in a one-man step, lights shot through the gate like twin suns.

"Duck, Polly!" Barratt dropped Whittleby's arm and flung himself down. Rolling out of range of the lights, he groped through mud for the pick and spades.

"What's the matter, Rod? Isn't that the mine car?"

"Can't be sure. Sade was to tell them to use the back road."

"Perhaps it's Violet," Polly whispered, crouching beside him. "If she'd taken Marjorie home—and Sade told her—"

"We can't take a chance till we see who it is!" He jerked at her arm. "Crawl under that weeping willow." Tools tight against his body, he followed. Then, behind the portiere of branches, came only the rattle and swish of the storm.

Something moved in the headlights too briefly for identification. A man's figure, black against the glare, appeared at the gate. He was either a very large man or the lights made him seem larger. Opening one half of the sagging iron grille, he left it canted into the mud and began to walk toward them.

Polly crept closer to Barratt. In the dripping dark he could feel her tremble.

The man came on past their tree and sent a flashlight beam toward the open grave. Asa Whittleby stood there again as Polly and Barratt had seen him first, thin-legged and hunched between the piles of dirt that tomorrow would cover his son.

"That you, Doc?" asked the shadow. But now it was more than a shadow. It had a name.

The doctor under the willow made no move to answer. He put out a hand and gripped his companion's arm in warning. Polly Neale had stirred as if she meant to step out; his grip tightened. "That's Jim Iyloe. Don't you know his voice? God, it's lucky we ducked."

"When the men from the mines get here, he'll see *them*. They won't know they have to duck!"

"If they were here they'd help me handle him. — Listen!" His body tensed with hope. The wind had dropped for a moment, and he heard—no. The hope died again. That sound was the engine of Tyloe's car, left running at the gate.

The man in the road spoke again. "Myrtle Young said you flew the coop again, Doc. You got her worried."

That could be double-talk. Tyloe's coming tonight had been so well timed—from the point of view of someone wanting delay. It was odd that his lights had appeared so suddenly, right at the gate. If he'd just come from town, wouldn't they have been in sight all the way down the hill? Perhaps it wasn't the old doctor whose shadow had dodged among the tombstones. If Tyloe knew Barratt and Polly were here—knew why they were here, and he'd been waiting—

But maybe they'd been down in the hollow where the older graves were when Tyloe was driving that last half mile. Or maybe they'd been just too busy to notice lights on the hill. At least he hadn't noticed *them*. And Polly surely would have said something if she'd *seen* them. She'd want to warn him. . . .

For half a minute a fantastic thought stung his brain. Polly—twice Polly had wanted to appeal to Tyloe, though she must know that it would mean the loss of all their hope. She'd talked interminably with Whittleby. It was almost as if *she* were trying to delay the search, driving him near to madness himself. . . .

He glanced down at Polly. The distant gleam of the headlights caught her wet face and showed him *its* look of strain. She was listening as anxiously as he.

Out there in the rain, while coats flapped and bushes flailed, Jim Tyloe's heavy voice was as usual laying down the law. He always told Red Forks what to think and how to vote and where to make investments. If the town didn't do what Tyloe said, it might wish it had—later on. "You dreamt it Doc. You couldn't of seen a girl out here a night like this." The old man muttered something inaudible. "A stallion and a filly?" Tyloe spluttered with laughter. "Well, maybe, maybe! Horses usually got more sense, though. What the hell'd you get here in, anyway? That car that went off the road there at Dead Man's Point?"

"An accident?" Dr. Whittleby turned. "Where's my case?"

"Keep your shirt on, Doc. There was no one in it; I climbed down far enough to see that. When Myrtle said you was gone and your car still locked up, I figured you might of come out here in a—hmm—borrowed car. And maybe you did"—he trained his flashlight on the old doctor's feet—"your shoes show you've walked quite a bit."

Wouldn't they ever stop talking and leave? Barratt's shifting feet struck the sharp edge of something solid. —Another headstone. No wonder he wasn't getting anywhere. Headstones, footstones, pillars, slabs—everywhere he turned something heavy was dragging at him, some dead weight—marble or man—holding him back. The monuments no longer seemed symbols of mourning, but of hate—visible, like breath on a cold morning that had gone a step farther and solidified. The hate of those two men out there, of Tyloe's brother-in-law the undertaker Ed Quigley, of the old gravedigger who lived in the cottage by the gate, the inexplicable hate of Violet Prager. . . .

"Hand me that flashlight, Jim," said Dr. Whittleby, "I'll show you there were people here. I'll show you their tracks. I'll find that stallion and filly!" His voice went up. "I'll show them Asa Whittleby's still someone to be reckoned with. Give me that flashlight."

Polly shrank closer against the small tree-trunk. Rod gripped the pick. He couldn't risk being stopped now. If Tyloc followed their tracks with the light . . .

"The flashlight, Jim. Give me the light."

"Who you think you're talking to, Doc? Anyhow, it's time for you to go home. Myrtle's sure out for your scalp."

"Myrtle!" the old doctor snorted. "Why, I was wiping that girl's nose just a few years ago. And now she thinks she can tell me what to do! But there's one thing she's good for, Jim. Ever taste her cheese soufflé? If it weren't for that I'd send her packing. It's not everyone makes a good soufflé."

Barratt groaned inwardly. It was seven o'clock when that phone call came. It was after nine now—God knew how much after nine—and the voice on the phone had said "probably five or six hours". . . . *Probably five or six hours.* . . .

"Come on, Doc." Tyloc's heavy voice sounded heavier. Why didn't he *make* the old man go? It wasn't like Red Forks's Chief of Police to be patient.

Suddenly, just as he'd given in a while ago, the old doctor gave in again. The two started off. Tyloc's right hand held Whittleby's arm, his left the dark flashlight. If he turned it on near the willow tree, or picked up a footprint . . .

Did he really believe that Whittleby's story of the visitors in the cemetery was simply mental wander-

ing? Maybe all Tyloe's talk and his unnatural patience were part of a plan.

The flashlight, still dark, passed the willow tree. Barratt felt Polly relax and his own breath came out in a grunt. Now if nothing happened to make one of those men change his mind . . .

They went through the sagging gate, even closed it behind them. Then at last a motor chattered and the headlights left their post.

Barratt shot through the willow fringe without feeling the sting of the branches. He had the canvas loose by the time Polly reached him. As they lifted it together his flashlight was ready.

Polly's end dropped. The grave was empty. It was only a square-cornered hole.

Barratt flopped the canvas back, threw down his tools, and jumped in.

His spade hit something hard. Just rock. But by now Polly was down in the hole with her spade.

They worked fast, one at each end, testing every few inches. Before they met in the middle they knew it was hopeless. The grave had been dug to bedrock.

"Now where?" asked Barratt tightly.

Down in the muddy hole they stared at each other.

"Wait, Rod. Wait!" —Though he'd made no move to leave.

Polly stood beating her knuckles together. "Let me try to remember that voice on the phone. Did he say Marjorie was actually—buried in the cemetery? He said she was in a 'big enough' coffin—she was 'with the dead'—but did he say she was underground, here?"

"The Teddy bear had cemetery mud on it."

"Yes, but it could have been smeared on. If he wanted to give a false lead—make it that much harder

. . . Look, Rod, could Philip Whittleby's casket have arrived early? Could it have been taken to Ed Quigley's until tomorrow? I know it would be sealed, of course, but—what if—"

"God! Put—put someone else in with—"

"Oh, I didn't mean that! I can't believe anyone, even this fiend would do that, and certainly if it was old Dr. Whittleby—I just meant maybe she isn't out here at all. Perhaps he put her in a coffin right there at Ed's without taking it out of the building. The paper said a coffin was stolen. That means someone was able to get into the place. He might have stolen the coffin just to throw you off the track, and then sneaked back later."

"Yes, and maybe there isn't a coffin at all. Maybe Violet Prager'll come driving back—"

"If we could just find her!" Polly said. "You don't suppose we should have started from that angle? Because she'd be able to tell us, or she might even have—"

"Yes, yes, I know. Maybe this is just someone's idea of humor." He jabbed rock viciously with his pick. "I have to make myself think it could be—or go crazy."

"Oh, Rod." Polly drew in a sharp breath.

He straightened. "And the only way I can avoid that is to keep moving, doing something. . . . You may have a point about that coffin. If one was missing, that's the one I'd be supposed to think of now, not the ones that were left. If it should be at Ed's—" Suddenly he struck the pick into the earth, and let it stay there. "We'll go, Polly. We'll go to Ed Quigley's undertaking joint and have a look."

"You mean—break into his place?"

"Sure." He cracked again, momentarily, snarling at her. "D'you think we ought to call Ed down to help us look?"

"But if we lose all that time and she isn't there—"

"We're taking a chance every move we make. This is just one more we've got to take."

She sighed. "Perhaps you're right. But if help comes and we're not here?"

He gritted his teeth. "Are you still kidding yourself that somebody will come?"

"They *must*, Rod. Unless Sade couldn't get anyone—if we could just call her somehow, before we lost time going back!"

"We can." Barratt's jaw set. "Hummel's got a phone."

"But he'd never let you in, Rod, and if he's not there, the house'll be locked."

"How are we going to get into Ed Quigley's—ring the doorbell? Get set and I'll give you a boost."

He tossed up his tools and climbed out behind her. They slogged through mud toward the gate with the custodian's cottage a dark hulk beside it, one hulk that wasn't marble.

The black tops of the pines in front of Barratt's car plunged and reared like black horses. Or funeral plumes on horses' heads . . .

Polly shivered. "This wind doesn't warm the rain any, does it?"

"I hadn't noticed," he said vaguely. "Better button your coat higher."

The cottage was in front of them now, unlighted and still.

"Ring the bell, Polly. It'll save our getting shot in case he's home. If he won't let you in, put your foot in the door and I'll slug him."

He stepped around the corner, peering out, while Polly rang. The buzz of the bell, one of the old-

fashioned twist type, unelectrified, joined the orchestra of the storm.

When he'd waited until he was ready to tear the house apart, board by board, Barratt called softly: "O K., I'll try a window."

The fourth one yielded. He heaved himself over the sill and clicked on his flashlight. A chair leg—a small table—on the wall above it a board with a row of hooks, a key on one hook . . . The light paused. From a hook on the other end of the board hung the photograph of a shining blond girl.

Old Hummel's granddaughter, Donna Parks. Pretty kid, it had been a shame he couldn't save her. Well, a doctor couldn't keep thinking of all the times he'd missed.

On the table beneath the photograph stood a vase with a few green branches—the best Hummel could do for flowers at this time of year. Poor old fellow and his shrine; he'd loved the girl. . . . Where was that damned phone?

And then, when he found it, the receiver kept slipping in his muddy hand.

He went out the front door. Polly, standing in the rain that drove under the porch roof, huddled in her coat against the cold, jumped when the door was pulled open.

"That settles it," Barratt said through a tight jaw. "Sade drew a blank on all the Pellegrinis but she finally got hold of the mines. The fellow she talked to was stupid-sounding, but she got the message through his head. He repeated it after her. The call went through—and if the men had chosen to come they could have got here three times over!"

"Don't say that, Rod. Perhaps they've had a breakdown." She was running to keep up with him. "But what about—"

"No. No one's had any news of—of Violet."

They splashed by three graves before he spoke again. "We haven't thought out the mechanics of this thing, Polly. How did anyone steal a coffin, take it up here or anywhere, without being noticed? And how was it carried? You couldn't get it into an ordinary car."

She gave him one of her quick looks. "You'd need a truck. Old Hummel has one—but his car shed was empty."

"Or," said Rodney Barratt in his careful flat voice, "you'd need a hearse."

Polly caught a sharp breath. "Ed—himself? Oh, surely not!"

"Why not? It's no crazier than some of the other thoughts I've had. If this—thing has really happened, nobody's sane." He seized her arm, swerving off on a short cut through the trees.

Polly rubbed her toe and fell, gasping.

Barratt flashed on the light as he bent to help her. "Are you hurt, Pol— My God, that was Alice's headstone."

She began to laugh. The wind swooped on her sobbing laughter and caught it up into the storm. "Even Alice would excuse my unseemly haste this time. Even Alice—" Her hysteria died abruptly as the beam of Barratt's torch swung around and focused on the grave.

It was piled from end to end with fresh earth.

"Oh, no," he said slowly. "They wouldn't—not here!" \*

## ALICE CORBIN BARRATT

I'VE been very happy here, snug and safe where people can't get at me; the people who said: "You must make an effort, Alice!" Those who kept telling me: "Rodney's a *man*, Alice. A man who's attractive to women. . . ."

The Corbin lot is the largest and best in the Red Forks cemetery. I was glad of that when I was alive, though Rodney laughed at me. But then, he so often laughed at things that weren't really funny.

He said we Corbins were bound that our graves should literally be fine and private places. Only, at the end, perhaps he did realize that I'd be so content to be here, with my grandparents and mother and with Papa close beside me again.

Papa was big and broad; he had a deep voice that

went through you and he smelled of cigars and bay rum and saddle leather. He called me his "little princess." Mamma was a Dresden china doll. She had a pale face and soft brown hair and her voice was a pleasant murmur—

Except when— One night I dreamed that I woke and went to the bathroom by myself. And Mamma and Papa were talking in their room and she shrieked. . . .

In my dream, that is, this woman shrieked; "Yes! Yes! Yes! Are you pleased? You've had your fun and with luck you'll get the son you want to carry on the Corbin name. You don't care that I have to go through it again, even though the doctor told you—he *told* you—"

That couldn't possibly have been Mamma. She would never have talked to Papa like that. But she had a baby and it died and so did she.

I was very young but I tried to be Papa's little housekeeper. He'd let me stay up late and he'd talk to me about being a Corbin and what that meant in Red Forks. But he died when I was fourteen.

I didn't think I could bear it at first. The house was so empty. The smell of his cigars lingered in it; his dogs kept whining for him and the cut-glass decanters in the dining-room grew little rims of sediment from just sitting, undisturbed, on the sideboard.

I had only Sade Kushins. She was a distant cousin and when I was older I realized that she'd adored Papa though he never gave her a second look. Papa thought it was a woman's duty to be attractive and poor Sade certainly wasn't that.

She was a very good housekeeper and practical nurse, but after Papa died it was Doctor Whitteby who

decided important questions. I loved Doctor. Later, I couldn't understand why Rodney never liked him.

Doctor thought I must go to boarding school in Berkeley. That was horrible. Of course my schoolmates were nice enough girls; just thoughtless and light-minded. They thought mostly about week-end dates and football games. I suppose they didn't mean to be unkind but they did seem to find what I had to say about the Corbins and Red Forks just a little amusing.

I'd never been strong and finally I was very ill and when the school doctor couldn't help me, they sent for Doctor and he took me home, for good.

So then there were all those quiet, pleasant years. I studied music and read a lot so I'm sure I was as well educated as most girls. I'd never have to earn my own living. Papa had left me enough money to get along on very comfortably in Red Forks where you could do very nicely on a hundred dollars a month when you owned your own home.

But I didn't want to be an old maid, of course. I wouldn't have liked that even if I hadn't fallen in love with Rodney as soon as I saw him. I don't know why he reminded me of Papa. Papa was always well groomed and Rodney never was. I suppose it was only that they were both so strong and sure of themselves.

I did have to go a little out of my way to let Rodney know I liked him very much or he might not have asked me to marry him. He was so sweet and diffident when he finally did ask me if I thought we "might make a go of it?" I said I knew that we could and he kissed me and kept on kissing me until I had to remind him that we weren't married yet. I was very happy that night but the next morning I had to talk to Doctor and Sade.

Sade just looked at me for a minute with those light, blank eyes of hers. Then she said: "You're a fool, Allie."

Sade should not have spoken to me in that way but she was so faithful that I made allowances for her. "What's wrong with things like they are? You haven't got a worry in the world, Allie."

"But I'm old-fashioned, not an independent woman who wants a career. I want a husband and—and—children."

"Children?" Sade sniffed. "You ain't built for it, any more than your Ma was. And you won't like—*it*. Take my advice—"

I said coldly: "Please don't be vulgar, Sade." Her pale, full cheeks reddened slowly. She turned away, looked back at me and said flatly:

"Well, you've made up your mind, I see. I can't blame Barratt. You've got a little money and you're a pretty thing—now. But Doc Whittleby isn't goin' to like it so you'd better tell him yourself before the news gets around "

But Doctor was sweet. He said "Little Alice! Well, I should have expected this but I'd hoped—"

"Don't you like Rodney, Doctor?"

"He's a very enterprising and energetic young man. And there is room for two doctors in Red Forks with the mines and the outlying farms to be served. But I'm afraid Rodney considers I'm just an old horse-and-buggy doctor. Which I'm proud to say, I am. And a sentimental old duffer besides."

He patted my hand. "I'd hoped you'd marry a quieter, gentler sort than Barratt. It's not easy, being a doctor's wife. I'm afraid you'll find that your husband won't take your ailments seriously. So don't forget the old fogey who brought you into the world. I've thought

of you as a daughter, my dear. I always wanted one and I've only a son who isn't too affectionate—"

He patted my hand again and was suddenly businesslike. "You want to talk to me as a doctor, too?"

"Y-yes." My face kept getting hotter and hotter as I went on. "Sade's outspoken but she'd never—talk to me. And I wouldn't listen when the girls at school would begin to giggle and whisper."

"And quite right, my dear. Now, you must not be shocked, Alice. This is quite normal and natural though it may seem degrading to you at first, as a woman. But it's necessary to most men. And if you are to have children—? Yes, I was afraid you would want them and if you didn't, I'm sure that Rodney would still not— Well."

Then he told me and I was shocked, though he used a lot of dry medical terms. But he was very explicit and what he said had nothing to do with—love. But then I thought: "Rodney won't be like that. He'll be considerate."

And really, he was. It wasn't his fault that I couldn't stop crying that night in San Francisco in our room at the Palace. . . . That was something we never mentioned. Rodney did try to talk to me later on. But I just couldn't. I don't think nice people do, not in such an offhand way.

Besides, though I'm sure he meant to be kind, he'd say things that were coarse. One night he said to me abruptly: "There's a bedroom downstairs. Does Sade have to sleep up here, next door to us?"

"But that's been her room for years. I couldn't ask her to move out of it. And why should I?"

"You know why, damn it!" He hesitated. Perhaps he was laughing. I'm not sure. "All right, my sleeping

beauty. Perhaps the trouble is that I'm no prince. I'm just an ordinary guy who loves you and—"

"And I love you, Rodney!"

"I believe you do. But not the way I want you to—not yet. Oh, I know I'm a damned fool and I demand too much of you and it scares you. But you're a very pretty woman, my darling, and I— Well, somehow, if I've any brains at all, one of these days we'll begin to make sense to each other. Meanwhile, Sade's no help."

"Sade's devoted to me, dear. You don't realize—"

"But I do. Have her move downstairs, Alice. Every night I imagine she's tiptoeing around the hall, trying to listen to us."

"But that's so foolish of you."

"Perhaps. She had a passion for your father, didn't she?"

"Now you're being terribly vulgar!"

"No," he said, "it's she who's vulgar. You'll admit she didn't think highly of your mother? So she says that you're your 'father's daughter,' ignoring the fact that you look like your mother. She's substituted you for your father. She's a smooth-cheeked old dragon and she wanted you to die unmarried. That would have compensated for all the time she watched your mother and father come into this bedroom and close the door on her."

I thought that was a shocking thing for him to think, let alone put into words and I said so. Rodney sighed. After a minute he said gently: "I'm sorry, dear. Go to sleep and forget it."

Of course I didn't forget it but I didn't mention the matter again. And before too long I knew I was

pregnant and I was very happy. But I lost that baby at six months. Doctor took care of me and once when they thought I was asleep, I heard him say to Rodney:

"She's got to have a good, long rest, Barratt! Unless you *want* her to die?"

"Alice is determined to have a child, Doctor Whittleby," Rodney said grimly. "Though thanks to your bungling premarital instruction, she— Well, skip that. And I'd like to have a child. You understand that, don't you? You have a son. And Alice won't be happy, childless, so . . ."

Still, Marjorie wasn't born until '43 and not until after Donna Parks died. It was because of that; because of what Rodney thought Doctor had done, that I had to go to a hospital in Sacramento and have a strange doctor. Oh, he was a friend of Rodney's, the best in that city. But he was so impersonal. Though I never said so to Rodney, I knew I wouldn't have had such a hard time of it if I could have stayed in Red Forks and had Doctor with me.

Of course I couldn't. Rodney may have been very rash and I couldn't believe he was right about Doctor. But I was Rodney's wife and I had to stand by him.

Marjorie was a lovely baby and she was worth everything. But people say you forget the pain—and I never did. I couldn't take care of Marjorie myself, so we couldn't have managed without Sade even if she wouldn't always follow Rodney's instructions.

She thought too much sun wasn't good for babies and when Marjorie was older, that it wasn't modest for her to have a sun bath "with nothing on." Rodney laughed when I told him that. It was rather amusing, I suppose. Still, Rodney certainly shouldn't have asked Sade, even

laughingly, if she'd insist when Marjorie was older that she take her baths "Victorian style," with a sheet covering her and the tub.

Sade turned sullen and wouldn't speak to him for a week. That made me very unhappy. Oh, I understood that as a doctor Rodney took many things for granted that Sade couldn't help considering a little disgusting. But though I often found Sade irritating I did know that she would always look after Marjorie very faithfully.

That was the only thing that really mattered. Because even then I felt that before too long, someone else would have to look after my baby. There was one thing I could do for her myself. I put Papa's money into a trust fund for her. It was unkind of people to hint that Rodney didn't like that. He tried to help me to make the arrangements but it turned out that I knew more about investments and property than he did.

He was rather surprised at that. When I said: "But Rodney, dear, money can't be left just to—to manage itself, you know," he laughed and shrugged.

"Money has mostly managed me," he said. "I get it and spend it. It's as simple as that."

"But you aren't businesslike." I'd wanted to tell him that for some time. "Your patients could all pay their bills if they had to; if they'd give up some luxury they aren't entitled to. But of course if you don't care to have more money—"

He shrugged again. "I didn't say that. I'd like a small lab with all the best equipment. That runs into money. The work I do at the mines takes a lot of time and I get very little money from it—"

"Then why don't you give it up, dear?"

"Someone has to look after those people and I like

them. Whittleby never did. And where would I find time for research? My time is well taken up—and I've got to get back to the office now."

He picked up his bag, turned back to kiss me and said: "Try to get out, dear, will you? Go to see somebody; take a walk, even if it's only downtown—"

I promised him that I would, and whatever people said, I didn't give up at once. I did try to get well. But I was always so tired. Too tired even to think about the war.

It was very terrible, I know, and I knew that Rodney hated to have to stay in Red Forks. So why should we have discussed the war news? There was nothing we could do to help. I gave things to all the drives and bought bonds and sometimes we hadn't quite enough sugar and had to use margarine instead of butter.

The war did come home to us when Phil Whittleby was killed and poor Doctor was suddenly old and even a little—well, queer. I wrote him a note then without telling Rodney but he never answered it.

By the last year of the war I wasn't going out at all—but then, people weren't entertaining very much and we weren't often asked out. People would come to see me, though, and I was careful to ask Polly Neale to dinner at least once a month though Sade always grumbled when I did.

Whatever people thought, I always liked Polly. At least, I wasn't jealous of her. She was attractive enough if you admire that husky peasant type. You could tell at once that she had no real background; none that counted. But she was efficient and capable and I was glad that Rodney had someone like that in his office.

But Sylvia Stevenson was different. Everyone in Red Forks knew what Rodney did and where he went, so it

was odd that he mentioned Sylvia to me before anyone else did. One night he asked if I knew her.

I said: "Oh, she was quite the village belle in high school. She was considered a little fast, though. She'd do things like making a pet of that common little Violet Prager though the Stevensons themselves are one of our good old families. They moved to Oakland and I heard that Sylvia married but if—"

"She did. She's divorced and took back her maiden name. Her husband turned out to be a hopeless alcoholic."

"How dreadful! But they do say there's always some reason why a man drinks—some lack, or—"

"He was a dipso when she married him though he managed to conceal the fact until afterward."

"Oh? I hope she has no children. Because—"

"She doesn't drink," Rodney said briefly.

"No? Though if her husband was a secret drinker—Why has she come back to Red Forks? She must have become quite confidential," I said, smiling. "I know you won't tell tales out of office hours but it seems a little odd—"

Rodney jabbed at his roast beef. "I wanted to know why she's underweight and generally run-down and can't sleep. Seems she had a paid job and tried to do volunteer war work besides. When she collapsed, her parents insisted that she come up here to live in their old home and take life easy for a while. I wish you'd call on her, Alice."

"But I hardly know her."

"If you take the lead, others will follow." That was quite true. "And she remembers you. Says that when they studied *Idylls of the King* in high school, she thought of Elaine as looking like you."

"Really? Well, my hair was more yellow than brown in those days and—I'll try to call on her, Rodney. It would be the kind thing to do."

And I did intend to go but then friends began telling me how she'd joined our Red Cross and wouldn't miss a meeting and wanted to do things like starting a home nursing class and thought we should do something about salvaging tin cans; manage somehow to have them picked up. The older women didn't like that but some of the younger people admired Sylvia just because she'd lived in the city for a while.

It wasn't her place to call on me so I was amazed when she did, one afternoon. She said that Rodney had urged her to, since I wasn't well.

She was very good-looking in a bold sort of way. She didn't wear a girdle and if she did wear a brassiere, it certainly didn't— She didn't wear stockings, either. She said she hadn't had nylons for two years and couldn't find rayons. Which was a very good excuse for going bare-legged, of course.

I said that I was so glad that she had waived formality and asked her to have a drink. She said she didn't drink but that I mustn't "let that stop me." So I did have a drink while we talked. But only because I felt so awfully cold that afternoon.

I didn't return her call. I felt too ill to make the effort though I always told Rodney, when he'd remember to ask, that I was "much better." He went day and night, came home to dinner at all hours. He'd always tell me where he'd been, if I asked. If he did sometimes stop off to see Sylvia, it was on Red Cross business.

I finally decided to have a dinner party. Rodney wasn't enthusiastic. He said: "When you consider the

amount of food fourteen people will consume— And I'll not have any black market stuff on our table!"

"Rodney, I wouldn't think of it. But Sade does know so many farmers around here so— And we're all war-weary, you know. We need some relaxation and people here look to *us* to do these things."

"Do they?" Rodney said. "I suspect that my town patients have finally realized I've no social sense. Polly says so."

"How dare she! A little upstart like— Oh, I'm sorry," I said. "And I'll ask her and Sylvia— One has to call her Sylvia because she isn't really Miss Stevenson."

"No, she isn't. But why," Rodney said gently, "shouldn't you call her Sylvia, dear?"

"I'm afraid I'm old-fashioned. First names don't come easily to me. And I can't understand why, even if a woman simply *must* divorce her husband, she ever takes back her maiden name. It seems to me that if you've ever been married to a man, you're always still his wife—"

"Till death do us part," Rodney said absently. But suddenly his eyes darkened and he came over and put his arms about me. "Alice! You're right though you didn't say that. I did. But you're not; you don't think that you—"

I was tired and I wanted to settle the details of my dinner. I do think that was excuse enough. Men are so impractical; they think good meals and a clean house just happen. Still, I wish I hadn't pushed him aside and said:

"Rodney, please!" But there was something I had to tell him and I was afraid he wouldn't like it so I went on, quickly: "I've asked Jim Tyloe."

Rodney's eyebrows came down until they nearly met across his nose, and he said: "Tyloe? Did you ask Ed Quigley, too?"

That wasn't fair or kind. I said: "Rodney, even if Ed hadn't gotten to be a little odd, I wouldn't ask him. Even if he is a Quigley he's just not the sort of person you ask to dinner. Besides, I know that since Nancy died, you two—"

"Yes? What do you know, Alice? I didn't tell you—"

"Rodney, dear! At least four women told me that Ed believes that you didn't come to Nancy when she called you, when she was—"

Rodney flinched. That wasn't like him and somehow, I found myself beside him with my hands on his shoulders. "Of course I don't believe that! You've too much integrity; deep down, you're too kind ever to—"

Rodney's arms closed about me. He said, huskily: "I'm damned glad to know you're so sure of that, Alice."

I drew away from him and he let me go. Rodney was always very considerate. I said.

"But the Tyloes and the Quigleys, along with the Stevensons, have been here almost as long as the Corbins have. I know you think it's silly and snobbish to believe that family does matter, but I do believe it. Not that I haven't heard gossip about Jim Tyloe, though you know I try not to listen to it or believe it. Still, I'm afraid he may have been a little strict with Nancy, though undoubtedly he meant well.

"Not," I added, "that I like Jim, though I believe that a certain type of woman would consider him attractive. It's just that we'll have two extra women, Sylvia and Polly. And where am I to find two extra men

in Red Forks? But if you aren't willing for me to have Jim here, of course I'll make some excuse. I'll—I'll just postpone the dinner."

I tried to speak pleasantly and calmly but I felt so wretched that my eyes filled with tears. Rodney said quickly: "No, dear. I shouldn't have thrown cold water on this dinner project. I'm sorry. It will be good for you to do something like this, and if Tyloe is willing to sit at our table I'll be reasonably polite to him." He smiled at me. "You go ahead and have fun, honey. And pray that nobody has a baby that night because I promise you I'll be here if I possibly can."

He was and everyone said it was a wonderful party. The food was perfect and I brought some of Papa's wine up from the cellar. But I kept feeling more and more ill as dinner went on. Perhaps it was a good thing that, though I sat where the hostess does, I didn't have to direct the conversation. Because Sylvia saw to that.

She wore a dinner dress that I'm sure would be considered extreme even in the city. I don't think Polly Neale admired it, either, though her own dress was far too "sporty" for a semiformal dinner party.

I don't think she liked Sylvia's monopolizing the conversation, either. Oh, she did ask the men their opinions and draw them out in talk—mostly about the war, which was what I thought we wanted to forget.

We had bridge afterward but by midnight people started to go. I think Jim Tyloe wanted to take Sylvia home. Perhaps not. He ended by taking Polly home and I got the impression, from the way she and Rodney looked at each other, that she didn't really want to go with him.

They left before Sylvia did. She went off with our

young-old town lawyer. His eyes kept going up and down her as he waited. They were the last to leave and suddenly she came back and murmured to Rodney:

"Shoemaker's children go barefoot, pal."

"Hmm? What the—?"

"Alice—" Alice! As if we were friends! "Alice is about ready to keel over and has been for some time," she said and went out.

At least I didn't begin to cry until then. I wish now that I hadn't. Because Sade came in at once and she heard everything I said before Rodney carried me upstairs.

I never came downstairs again until they carried me through the cold, narrow hall, taking me to Papa.

Once Rodney realized that I was really ill, he got specialists from San Francisco. I think they all said that it was not impossible for me to get well. "Only—" they would add. . . .

Rodney managed to get a nurse, too: Miss Gruen. I know she didn't like him and she was impatient with Marjorie. Marjorie would manage to slip away from Sade, into my room. Though I always loved to see her, it took all of Miss Gruen's time to look after me properly and it annoyed her to have Marjorie about.

I couldn't possibly like anyone who'd be cross to my baby. I thought Miss Gruen was not at all a nice person but she was competent and she looked after me so well and when Rodney dismissed her, he couldn't get anyone else. It was weak and silly of me but I cried about that. It did seem that Rodney should be able to find another real nurse. They couldn't still be needed so badly in hospitals or overseas, now that the war was over, I thought.

While Miss Gruen was there Sade resented her; but

when Rod let her go, and told Sade that, with her help, he'd manage to take care of me himself, Sade was sullen for a long time. It wasn't until she finally realized that I was going to die that Sade began to fight so hard to keep me from it.

Overworked as Rodney was, he seemed always to know, even in his sleep, when I was lying awake. He'd appear suddenly, give me something—pills or a powder—and then sit and hold my hand until I slept.

But if he was on a confinement case or someone was dying, he'd be out half the night. Then Sade would come in and sometimes she'd look at the medicine on my bedside table and I'd hear her mutter: "Wonder what he'd give her if he was here?"

Toward the last, I wouldn't let them bring Marjorie in except in the mornings when I was at my best. I didn't want her to remember me looking sick and haggard. There was so much I'd have liked to say to her if she hadn't been just a baby—a poor little girl who was never really going to have a mother. The best I could seem to do was to smile at her and whisper: "Be a good girl, darling—"

But I thought about her so much. She'd have a little money and Rodney would look after her health. It was fanciful of me to ask myself if perhaps she'd be better off not to have Sade at all. I hated—oh, I hated!—having Polly look after Marjorie sometimes when Sade was busy with me.

But towards the last I thought Polly would be a good, sensible stepmother. She'd be fond enough of Marjorie and look after her conscientiously. And she'd always slap her fat little hands when she was naughty.

Polly would never, as Sade had told me Sylvia did, get down on the floor and play "train" with Marjorie and

then sing nonsense rhymes like "The Owl and the Pussy Cat" to her. For Sylvia had called and of course I couldn't see her. But naturally, when Marjorie just happened to wander into the living-room, Sylvia made the most of her time. . . .

It was not so very long after that that I died. I think that, at the last, Sade was hysterical and Rodney had to push her from my room. But for me, it wasn't at all hard. I just let go.

So that was my life and I don't know—I really don't *know!*—why it counted for so little. I might as well never have lived if I hadn't left Marjorie. But I did! And if she's all right, everything's all right and—and I'm better off here.

One night before I died, Rodney was sitting beside my bed, though he looked so awfully tired that I wanted him to try at least to get a nap. He said no: he was expecting the telephone to ring at any minute.

But we didn't seem to have much to talk about. There was a bookcase near the bed where I kept some of Papa's old books and finally Rodney reached over, pulled a book from the shelves and began turning the pages.

Then he stopped and read something. A poem, I thought it was, and he seemed to read it more than once.

I said: "Rodney? What is it?" Because it seemed to me that suddenly he looked not just tired but—defeated.

He closed the book quickly. "Nothing important, darling. Just something that caught my eye." And then he put his head down on the bed, with his cheek against my hand—

The telephone rang and he went to answer it. And my hand was just a little damp. That's why I sat up and

managed to reach the book that he'd put on top of the case. It fell open of itself at the page Rodney had been reading. I read it, too, and I wanted to cry—for Rodney. Because it said:

But when pale Death, all featureless and grim, Lifted his bony hand, and beckoning, Held out his cypress-wreath, she followed him, And Love was left, forlorn and wondering, That she who for his bidding would not stay, At Death's first whisper rose and went away.

## THE MARBLE FOREST

**VII** • 9 25 P.M. to 9 30 P.M.

"No," he answered himself five minutes later, "not here."

The earth had been heaped loosely, roughly shaped into a mound, but the sod beneath it was undisturbed, gripped by tough roots of yellowed grass.

"Not here," Polly Neale echoed. She had stood recovering from the brief effects of her fall, watching as he scraped at the dirt. Barratt looked up, trying to grasp the implications of her tone. She was shivering, and her eyes were oddly bright.

"Rod," she said in a choked voice, "—you have horrible fancies in a place like this. I thought of someone returning Marjorie to her mother—because she'd be better off there."

He had been using his hands on the loose earth be-

cause the tools had been left beside Whittleby's grave. Now, shaking them roughly to get the mud off, he looked at her in bewilderment. "*Who* would be?"

"M-Marjorie."

"Better there—?"

"Than—than turned over to a woman who doesn't care for her except as a stepping stone to her own interests, who'd—" She began to laugh again, helplessly. "Maybe that's why they call 'em stepmothers!"

"Stop it, Polly," said Barratt in a grim voice. He began to move on, and she followed, half sobbing. They splashed by grave after grave while the pines kept growing larger and the headstones winked in the torch-light and disappeared again. His thoughts flicked in and out, too: "Good Lord, Polly hates Sylvia! Not from personal jealousy—no, it's not that, Polly hasn't a sentimental thought in her head about me, maybe not even a kind one; I ought to know, we've worked together so long. She admires me as a doctor, but she's hard. . . ."

"So what do I want in this job? Cushioning warmth—or flinty hardness?"

Then all of his personal life was blotted out as he turned the torch on his wrist. "My watch must be fast." He started running, though the car was only a few feet away. "It's got to be fast. It can't be nine thirty!"

**VIII • 9.45 P.M. to 10.30 P.M.**

THE malodorous alley at the rear of Ed Quigley's Furniture Emporium was completely dark, but as Polly's shoulder touched Rodney's he became aware that she was trembling. "What's the matter with you?" he asked irritably, his own raw nerves making him sensitive to, and exasperated by, any display of nerves on her part.

"N-nothing. Only do you think there's any use looking in there? After all, a coffin was stolen from Ed—"

"As a blind, maybe. We can't overlook anything, even the obvious."

"Then you go in and I'll keep watch out here."

He hesitated. "I think you'd be safer with me. This alley has a bad reputation."

Her voice was scarcely more than a panicky whisper. "It's just that I have a horror of the place."

"Not because of the cadavers?" said Barratt. "You work for a doctor, you can't afford to feel that way."

"No, no, I don't know why. It couldn't be Ed himself, Lord knows." She gave a spurt of nervous laughter.

Everyone laughed that way at the thought of Ed Quigley. To the small-town mind, his profession was a comic one, and the man himself was absurd in his attempts to give it dignity. Ed's face was meek and his voice unctuous and his one dream and topic of conversation was his grandiose, unfinished mortuary chapel; which had been five years a-building, into which he poured every cent he could lay his hands on, and which the town needed just about as much as it

needed a home for Civil War veterans. "I couldn't be afraid of Ed," Polly repeated, "but there's something uncanny about this place."

"You wait here, then," Barratt said curtly.

Womanlike, as soon as he yielded, she changed her mind. "No, I was just being silly, I'll go with you. But how shall we get in?"

It was a crucial question. The door was heavy, and the high windows were covered with a coarse wire netting, as Barratt's cautious flashlight revealed. He swore under his breath.

"We've got to be quiet," Polly added. "What if he's here?"

"Even if Ed's smaller than I am," said Barratt "if he catches us getting in I'll slug him. Nobody's going to delay us any longer "

"No, don't hit him! Not the very first thing!"

"Well, we haven't met him yet." He was examining the fastenings of the screens.

"But—I almost wish we would. Rod, he might be able to help, to tell us something that would point the way. He knows that cemetery. He's been arranging for the funeral tomorrow."

"Damn these windows." Barratt started toward the next one. It was these small delays that maddened him: to have a chance under your hand and then be prevented from grasping it.

"Wouldn't it be funny if the door weren't locked?" he heard Polly murmur; then she gasped. He turned the flashlight down; her hand was on the knob, the door had opened.

A faint, sickening, musty odor from within mingled with the smells of the Greek restaurant next to the Emporium. "Wasn't it locked?" Barratt asked.

"Yes; look." She directed the beam of his flashlight. "The lock is on but it hadn't quite caught. I wonder if that's how they got in to steal the coffin? If it often slips that way?"

Barratt studied it briefly. "Could be; it's old and worn. Come on, in we go."

Something warned him that this was too easy, that the mind that had designed the tortuous maze he was following had planned his taking this wrong turn. But he had no time to listen to inner voices, to analyze the situation; action, however bungling, was his only resource, his only hope.

A ten foot high tongue-and-groove partition separated this part of Ed Quigley's business from the front of the building, and compared to the mad clutter of furniture and household effects out there, it was neat and orderly. A battered desk stood in one corner, littered with papers and surmounted by an artificial funeral wreath; to the left, a row of four coffins stood on trestles. The whole room was not more than fourteen feet wide and twenty-five long; a coffin of a room, itself.

Polly moved toward the coffins. Squaring his shoulders, like a man trying to shift a heavy burden to a new position, Barratt followed her.

The lids were closed, the coffins were covered with gray flannel dustcloths. "Taking no chances on having to reduce them as floor samples," Polly said.

Though she spoke in a low voice, though the store was undoubtedly empty, Barratt touched her lips with his fingers in warning. She nodded and, drawing back the dustcover on the first coffin, lifted the lid. The coffin was empty.

The sort of involuntary groan a sick man makes burst

from him; he looked at Polly, his lips slack with suffering. "It's no use. . . ."

"We can't give up, Rodney; we can't."

"Of course not."

She shut the lid down softly, and removed the cover from the second coffin. It too was empty; lined with white satin, fancier than the first, but just as empty.

As Polly went around the end of the second coffin toward the third she sucked in her breath and whirled to face him, blocking his way in the narrow passage. "Here, Rod, give me the light, you go—go have a smoke," she said jerkily. But he crowded past her and turned his light full on it.

It was a child's casket.

Without waiting for Polly, he ripped off the dust-cloth and opened it with his left hand. Rose satin lined, obscenely waiting, it gawped back at him, empty. The lid slipped from his hand and banged shut. Tears stung his eyes and filled his throat.

"Rod, do be careful!" Polly whispered; they held their breaths, waiting.

They held their breaths—but someone was breathing, there in the little narrow room; a soft whish-whish-whish of sound. Polly's hand caught his and clung to it; icy cold it was, and his no warmer. "It's coming—from the coffin—" she said in the faint voice of one on the brink of losing consciousness. She sagged against the coffin, laid her head on the lid and began to move her hand to and fro idiotically like a metronome in time to the audible breathing, while he stood frozen, his mouth dry, his heart pounding.

Then, soft as the fall of earth into a newly dug grave, came the sounds of footsteps; the door into the Empo-

rium slowly swung open, a light was switched on. They were revealed to Ed Quigley, as he to them.

"I thought you might come back," he said.

"Thought we'd come back . . . ?" Barratt echoed, blinking dazedly at Ed, gripped as in a nightmare, unable to move, to think.

Ed Quigley was a small, ill built man, the color of an old bruise—one that has begun to turn yellow. He nodded a head that was small, even for his size, a smile on his prematurely wrinkled face. "Did you bring it with you?" he asked. "The coffin, I mean. I figured someone just took it for a joke. I hope you didn't damage it any; you'll pay if you did."

Polly, with a whimpering cry, began to scrabble at the dustcloth on the last coffin, the one against the wall. "Rod, the breathing has stopped, the breathing has stopped," she said, over and over.

"Leave that coffin alone!" Ed shrilled, leaping forward. "Can't have you handling and mauling the merchandise like that."

Barratt jolted into action. Catching Ed in the ribs with his elbow, he knocked him against the partition so hard the boards creaked. He ripped the cover off the coffin, threw the lid up and gazed blankly into the gray satin interior. No one, nothing.

He whirled toward Ed, who sat on the floor, blinking in a dazed way. "Where is she?" he cried, jerking Ed up by the elbows, shaking him roughly. "We heard the breathing in the coffin— Tell me!"

Polly was beside him, calm again; she touched his arm. "Don't scare him into a fit, Rod, or he won't tell us anything. I guess we just imagined we heard the breathing; there isn't anyone there."

He let go of Ed and stepped back a pace. "What's beyond that partition?" he asked, indicating the wall against which the last coffin stood.

"My embalming room," Ed answered in the stiff voice of one who was almost literally 'scared spitless'; he was continuing to shake on his own initiative now.

Barratt strode over; the door was padlocked. "Open it," he said impatiently.

"Why should I?"

Barratt glanced at Ed, noting automatically the clinical symptoms of fear; the damp skin, the muscular tensions, the rigid face; wondering: "Why is the little man so scared?" Physical cowardice alone wouldn't account for so extreme a reaction. Was it, could it be, that there was something in the embalming room he didn't want them to see? Something, or someone?

"Why should I?" Ed repeated, weakly combative. "You come sneaking in here, turn the place upside down, knock me around—"

"The key, quick," Barratt snapped, moving toward Ed.

"You'll go to jail," Ed whined. "Breaking and entering, assault and battery—"

"The key."

"It's not on me. And you'll spend a week trying to find it."

"Then I'll tear the hasp loose. Polly, bring me some sort of a bar from the front part of the store, will you?"

Polly touched his arm. "Let me handle this," she said in a low voice. Then going over to Ed, who watched her warily, she said: "Look, Mr. Quigley, I know we owe you an explanation—a dozen, as far as that goes. You've been very gentlemanly about the whole thing,

most men would have called the police without even giving us a chance to tell you why we're here."

Ed bought it; you could almost see his ego swelling, his fear-induced resistance crumbling. Polly hurried on, no hint of her aversion for him in her voice or manner. "You see, tonight Dr. Barratt got an anonymous phone call. Old Mr. Stone ran away again and this anonymous message said we'd find him 'in his coffin.' I answered the phone and thought it sounded like old Mr. Stone himself. It would be on a par with some of the other stunts he's pulled. He's quite harmless but the family is worried about him and—"

Ed sniggered. "Hiding in a coffin, huh, the crazy old coot! They ought to put old people out of the way when they get queer in the head like that. But say," he added, his eyes suspicious again, "Why didn't you just call me and ask if you could—"

"We called you repeatedly," Polly answered with reckless audacity. "You didn't answer all evening and we were getting desperate. Stone was overdue already for an insulin shot; we thought he might have gone into coma in a coffin and be unable to call for help."

Ed Quigley sounded almost apologetic when he spoke again. "So it was you on the phone, was it? I heard it ringing while I was hiding in there, waiting to catch the coffin thieves if they came back, but of course I didn't answer it."

Barratt looked at him sharply, but the yellowish face showed nothing but curiosity. The trap had not been tight enough. Ed might actually have been here, and someone else might have tried to call him—or he might be lying, it could have been he who watched in the cemetery, and hurried back to town after them. Neither was impossible; but through that unctuous voice one

could not descry the truth. The voice came again, quickening a little.

"Say, come to think of it, I wonder if it could have been old man Stone I saw out at the cemetery this afternoon when I went out to check if Phil Whittleby's grave had been dug?" Ed said. "Saw someone duck back of a headstone like they didn't want to be seen; struck me as sort of curious at the time, but I had to get back to the church. Say, the church decorations surely are pretty," he went on, unaware of the startled tension in his audience. "It's going to be a beautiful funeral." He rubbed his hands together; he all but licked his chops at the prospect.

"But you couldn't tell for sure that it was old Mr. Stone?" Polly said breathlessly. Ed's eyes moved brightly toward her. He shook his head.

"Ed, how heavy are these coffins?" said Barratt abruptly.

"How heavy?" Ed looked bewildered. "Well—you mean full or empty?"

Barratt swallowed. "Empty," he said. His voice nearly gave way; he turned his head aside, fighting for self-control.

"Could a man lift or handle one alone?" Polly supplemented.

"We wheel them around on trestles, no one could lift one."

"What about getting it on and off a truck—could one man do that?" Polly asked.

"Why, I suppose he could sort of slide it on from the trestle and then slide it off the end of the truck. But I don't see what you're getting at."

Barratt stirred, eyeing the locked door of the embalming room impatiently, his hands itching for a crow-

bar to pry the hasp loose with; hating Polly's more devious way of getting around Ed. He'd give her a minute or two more and then—

"I was wondering whether maybe old Mr. Stone wasn't your coffin thief," Polly was explaining guiltlessly. "They get pretty cagey, you know. He might have stolen it, hidden it away somewhere and—"

"I suppose he might've," Ed agreed. "But whatever he did or wherever he is, he isn't here now."

"Unless he's in there." Polly nodded toward the padlocked door.

Ed sniggered again, pointing out that a man would have to be more than crazy to go into a room and padlock the door behind him; he'd have to be a spook.

"But you don't always keep it locked, do you? Suppose he left something here, came back for it tonight, nearly got caught, darted into the embalming room and then you or your helper happened to notice the padlock was open and snapped it shut without looking inside—that's possible, isn't it?"

Ed granted that it was, just barely.

None of this was very convincing, Barratt knew; he wondered how much of it Ed believed. None, if he was the man behind their trouble. The thought that Ed might be their man, their fiend, brought a red mist before his eyes, made him long to grab the little rat and shake the truth out of him—and kill him afterward.

Polly was saying coaxingly to Ed: "Anyway, won't you just let us look into the embalming room to satisfy ourselves? You can think we're as crazy as old Mr. Stone, only—just let us look."

Ed wore an expression of amused contempt; his fear was gone—he was enjoying the sensation of having the upper hand of them, of having a pretty woman as sup-

plicant. "Is that the only way I can get rid of you? Well, now, I don't like to unlock— But look here: Jim hasn't said anything to me about old man Stone being missing. There's something fishy about this whole thing—"

"Listen, you little—" Rod began but Polly turned and gave him a triumphant wink; he broke off and stood glowering at Ed.

"Well, if you won't let *us* look, will you look yourself?" Polly pleaded.

"Sure I will—after you've gone. And if I find him, I'll notify Jim."

"That's fine, Ed. The family didn't want to call the authorities in, you know how families are—"

"No I don't," Ed said with a forlorn laugh. "I haven't got any family." He cast an oblique glance at Barratt, whose nerves tightened. "Here we go again," he thought with an inward groan. "He'll twist the knife in that old wound while Polly fiddles around putting the dustcovers back on the coffins, and the precious minutes tick away."

"Not that I ever blamed you for what happened, Doc; not for one minute. You did everything you could to save them—*after you got there*. Everything humanly possible, I've always said that. When other people say to me: 'Ed, if I was in your shoes I'd hate Barratt for letting your wife die in childbirth, for getting there too late—'"

"I got there too late to save her because I was called too late, Ed; and if you ask me it was no accident. She didn't want to live and that's the truth. Hell, even after I got there if she'd helped me fight— But she wanted to die."

"Why should she want to die? She was young."

"Because of the way you treated her, I suppose." "I shouldn't be talking this way to Ed," he told himself dully; but truth, bare and bitter as the awful facts he himself faced, was all he had to offer anyone now.

Ed's throat worked as if he were swallowing bitter words he daren't say. "Well, she had no right to take the baby with her," was what he finally did say.

"That's why he hates me then," Barratt thought; not that unhappy girl, his wife, but his son he can't forgive me for; not love, but possessiveness and egotism were thwarted by her death.

Ed went on, after a moment. And whatever lies one may have told you about me, Doc, the truth is I treated her like a queen, I worshipped the ground she walked on. She turned against me, I know, but I never did anything to deserve it. Say, by the way, how is that little girl of yours, Doc?"

Barratt felt as though a chilled hand had touched his bare heart. He stared speechless at Ed. This was, this must then be, his tormentor, his devil.

She's sure a cute little kid, Ed continued. Yellow curls, blue eyes, and smart — Say, she's bright as a button. I take quite an interest in her.

"Do you, by God?" Barratt's voice was so thick the words were undistinguishable.

'She's just about the age my boy would be if he'd lived. Well, that's life for you, some people are born unlucky and I'm one of them--' Hey, what are you doing in that desk?" he squalled, leaping forward.

But he was too late. Polly, as she recovered the coffin, had drifted unobtrusively over toward the desk, and now she held a bunch of keys in her hand.

Polly grinned at Ed. "When you said 'unlock' you

glanced over at the desk, so I figured the keys would be here," she said impudently.

"No, you don't!" Ed cried, and made a lunge for her. Barratt caught him by the collar, jerking him back. He had expected it to be easy, but he found himself almost losing balance. There was unexpected strength in Ed's wiry little body, he thrashed about like a big fish on the hook. "You keep out o' there!" he yelled. "That's my private workroom—you've got no right—there's nothing in there—" His arms reached out absurdly from the strained-back coat, flapping as if the fish were about to take off in flight.

"Have you got it, Polly?" Barratt said, panting. The padlock clicked and the door swung open. He saw her standing poised in front of it; she flipped a switch by the door, but no light went on, and she tried another switch. Ed Quigley, breathing hoarsely, gave one more convulsive twist.

Polly's shoulders sagged and a long breath deflated her whole body. "Empty," she said.

He'd known that was it. He might have expected it. Whenever he was lifted on a surge of hope, the fall was just so much harder. Mechanically he released his hold on Ed, who shook himself back into his coat. With the gesture he seemed to regain equanimity.

He gave Barratt one malevolent look and echoed: "Empty." He began teetering back and forth on his heels, thumbs through his vest, a smirk on his face. "Told you it was, told you it was," he gloated.

Barratt turned to go—and then paused. Ed had acted so scared at the thought of their looking inside, had tried so hard to keep them out—"I think I'll take a look around," Barratt said, moving toward the door. Ed's

smirk vanished. He tried to dodge ahead, to block the doorway, and then visibly changed his mind. Barratt's arm had shot out toward him, and he scuttled through ahead of them.

It was a bleak bare small room, the walls and floor covered with dingy brown linoleum, a battered old operating table in the center, a cupboard at the back. Ed Quigley's look darted to the cupboard, and then hastily away.

"So that's it," said Barratt, and jerked it open.

Once more his heart went down into limitless despair. The cupboard was barely six inches deep.

About to turn away he hesitated. On the shelves were bottles of embalming fluid and mortician's supplies, but on the top shelf his eye caught familiar labels: KAOPECTAN, CAROID, EMPIRIN, IQ&S, CHIRACOL, PLACIBO. There was also a Luer syringe and a bottle of codeine tablets.

"Well, well," he said grimly. "You wouldn't be practicing medicine without a license, would you?"

"No sir, those are for me, I'm a very sick man." Ed looked sick indeed, at the moment. He edged toward the door.

"Placebo seem to help any?"

Ed grinned over his shoulder, unable to resist a taunt. He knew what placebo was, all right, a pill doctors give people who have to have pills even though there's nothing physically wrong with them. What's the matter, Doc? You think you don't keep me supplied with customers fast enough, that I have to go out and kill them off myself?

"Stand still, Quigley. I've heard more than once that you've done a little black market doctoring. You

flunked out of medical school before you took up this trade, didn't you?"

"Maybe I learned more than you did, at that," Ed muttered.

"Well, it's no skin off my nose what you do, Ed, but the American Medical Association—"

The snigger again. "Oh, I know how strong your union is, Doc, and how hard you've fought for a closed shop. I wouldn't dare scab on you."

Barratt picked up the syringe. "How do you happen to have this, then?"

"Use it in embalming."

"And the codeine? Your customers are supposed to be past the need of narcotics."

Ed looked at him blandly. "Why, that's not mine! Unless my assistant—no, I can't imagine how that happened to be there. And—" He made a swift half-turn, thrusting his head forward, "I wouldn't advise you to press the point, Doctor. I might have to mention your breaking and entering."

"We didn't break anything" said Polly quickly.

"The outside door was locked, I set it myself," Ed insisted.

"The latch hadn't caught."

"Am I supposed to believe that?"

"Yes, I think you are."

"Well, I don't." Suppressed resentment was getting the upper hand of his discretion. "Your reputation's not perfect, Doc. How do I know you and your fancy piece here aren't —" •

Barratt's fist shot out; Ed ducked and the fist hit the wall behind him. The pain went through Barratt's arm in a sickening wave; he swore under his breath, and the

little man, watching him, laughed and edged again toward the door.

"Wouldn't try any rough stuff, Doc," he advised jeeringly. "I'm related to some kind of important people in this town. Jim hates your guts; he wouldn't ask for anything nicer than to have you down at the jail and work you over with his goon. A word from me and he'd do it, too." He nodded with satisfaction and then, as Barratt started toward him, scrambled hastily through the door, to the middle of the casket room.

Barratt had not intended any more violence. He walked out heavily, his heart a dragging weight in his side. Another blank, another failure—and so little time left! "I mustn't lose my temper again," he told himself dully; "I must keep my mind clear, I must hus band my strength."

"Come on, Rod, let's go," Polly said, and then, as if echoing his own thoughts: "We've drawn a blank here."

Ed was cock of the dunghcap again. "I'll just go with you," he announced. "Wait til I get my hat from the other room. I'll help you look for old man Stone. If he's shut himself up in a coffin he might suffocate before he's found."

"Never mind your hat," Barratt said. He and Polly exchanged a quick look. They couldn't take Ed along—and they dared not leave him free. He wanted to escape, probably to get Tyloe. There he was, sidling toward the door of the front section. He was still trying to hide something. . . .

Ed wavered, irresolute, a wary eye on Barratt. For the first time in minutes, there was silence, and something else became perceptible.

Again, from the coffin by the wall, came the sound of

breathing—regular, and yet labored too, as if the air were too thin and poor to give the lungs refreshment.

"It can't be!" Barratt shouted. "There wasn't anything—" But again he leapt at the coffin, again tore the dustcover off, opened it; again found it empty. The breathing went on, as if an invisible person lay there sleeping.

"Rod, look at him," Polly whispered. "He's doing it himself, somehow!"

Ed Quigley stood in the middle of the room, his expression a queer mixture of sullenness and pride. His mouth kept twitching with the beginning of a grin.

"All right," said Barratt harshly, "what is it—ventriloquism?"

"It's my trade secret," Ed mumbled, "but you've discovered now—I guess I may as well show you." He moved to the door in the partition and slid a hand around its edge. There was a faint click, and the breathing stopped.

Polly's teeth, heard by Barratt through a sort of vertigo, were chattering. "How do you do it?" she gasped. "You weren't near that coffin either time it started!"

Ed grinned again. "Before I saw you, I meant it to frighten the coffin thieves. The second time you set it off yourself, trying to turn on lights. It's a two-way switch, one outside the door here, the other by the embalming room." The grin faded. "It isn't *meant* to startle, of course. Oh, not at all. When I get my new mortuary finished, every private room will have one of these, and the bereaved will always be consulted first about its use." Incredibly, he was in earnest, almost sacredly in earnest.

This final lash of the fantastic had done to Barratt what nothing else throughout the night had done. He

could not move for a few minutes, through sheer nausea. Leaning on the edge of the empty coffin, head in hands, he listened dully to the voices; Polly's, horrified, saying: "But what in God's name *for?*" and Ed's, mild and smooth and rather astonished, answering:

"The object of my profession is to make the subject look as natural as possible. That's what everyone wants, isn't it? I do my best with restoring and coloring, but even when I've turned out a real masterpiece, there's something lacking."

"*Life itself,*" thought Rodney Barratt dully, fighting back the sickness.

"The sound of breathing," said Ed gently. "That's it." He might have been leading one of the bereaved into a private room, so perfectly was his voice tuned between sympathy and cheer. "The ear misses it, however well the eye is deceived. It would be such a comfort, I thought, if I could supply that want. So—it was quite simple, really, I don't know why no one's applied for the patent before—I thought of this little apparatus. It's a motor-driven bellows attached to the under side of the casket. Now, look here"—his voice sharpened—"no blabbing this outside! I had to tell you the secret, but my assistant is the only other one who knows. And it's being demonstrated at our next convention," he added with simple pride.

"*Assistant,*" Barratt thought dimly. "Any hope, or any danger there? No, it's young Harry Kimball, and he's at home with the flu. He's been home for four days."

He straightened and wiped a sleeve over his forehead. Better now; he could think and move again.

"Convention?" Polly was saying in a choked voice. She moved nearer to Barratt as she spoke, and glanced

down at his hand as he gripped the edge of the casket. It was the wrist that wore the watch.

"Why, yes," said Ed Quigley, sounding wounded. "You don't mean that—that you heard of the time they disapproved of me? The time I presented the idea of luminous make-up for the subject—for night, you know? I still think that, properly handled—but anyway," he added, more confidently, "*this* will make them change their tune."

"Oh, it will, I'm sure of it," Polly babbled. She looked quickly at Barratt and then at the watch again. "And you have a patent? It will make your fortune. I'm sure of it. I'm sure—" Her eyes wandered toward the embalming room and then, more vaguely still, back to Ed. As if with a stab of pain, Barratt came back to full awareness.

"Got to be going," he said gruffly. "Here, we can't leave the place in a mess. Sorry, Ed, it was all a mistake, you've been very patient with us." He bent to help Polly pick up the dustcover, and began clumsily flapping it over the top of the casket. Ed Quigley gave a nervous hiss and darted forward to do the job properly; the dustcloth flapped over his head, and Barratt, this time forewarned of his strength, gripped him firmly about arms and chest and propelled him violently toward the inner door.

Five seconds later the padlock snapped into place. Inside the embalming room, Ed began to pound and yell: well, let him, that room was almost soundproof; exit-proof too, with a ventilator in the ceiling and the wire mesh outside the windows.

Polly dropped Ed's keys into her pocket. "Oh, my God," she said in a despairing whisper, "all that time wasted!"

Had it been wasted—any more than the rest of their time? Barratt followed her at a run through the alley door and around to the front, toward where his car was parked at a safe distance. What good had they done in all these hours? There was nothing to do but go on searching; and yet an inner voice, with all the uncanny monotony of the mechanical breather, kept whispering to him: "What's the use? What's the use?"

## **IX • 10.30 P.M. to 11.00 P.M.**

FOR a minute they stood in the dark, rainswept street, listening at the door of Ed Quigley's Furniture Emporium. He might be crying out, but if so it could not be heard outside the store. Barratt nodded grimly.

He said: "We'd best go around to the house. Sade might have got something . . ."

The sight of his white house gave him a sick feeling of despair. It looked exactly as it had twice before on this evening, calm and cheerful with its shaded lights, so that the evening took on the quality of a nightmare in which one wanders hopelessly from one half-familiar scene to another, to another and back again; all of them a little wrong, growing hideous at last through sheer recurrence. Inside the house the repetition beat on him again. Once more the rooms were

empty, once more his voice echoed around the walls and there was no answer.

"Sade's gone," he said, clattering down the stairs. His jaw ached from the unconscious, constant setting of his teeth, his stomach turned over at the sight of the well-known hall and the clock—the clock ticking.

"She might have learned something and gone, herself, to investigate—but there's no note—she'd have left a message—"

Polly was at the telephone. She motioned him to silence. "What?", she said. "Since when did you say?"

In a minute she hung up and turned to him. "The wires to the mines are down. They collapsed in the storm some time this evening. Rod, we can't go on without help! If we drove over there—"

And waste another forty minutes? He was jerking her out the door, toward the car. And maybe for nothing? Sade got that one call through, and did they come? I know what's happened. They've sold me out too!" The car shot forward. The painful tension in his jaw was gone, he had transferred the pressure to the foot on the accelerator. At his side Polly was tense too, clinging to the door handle, bracing herself. This time she did not tell him to be careful.

Nightmare recurrence of the turn, the rough road winding through the hills, the slewing of the car on the patch of gravel, sick nightmare vision of the white shapes caught once by headlights, vanishing, gleaming again as the car swept around the last turn.

"Rod!" Polly said, "a light—I thought I saw one—"

"Where?"

"I don't know. It's gone now. Maybe in the cottage, maybe past it." But the caretaker's cottage was as dark as the night.

"Reflection on the cottage window, perhaps." He pulled up, this time beside the main gate. "We left the shovels over by the Whittleby grave. Come on."

The iron gates clanged as they swung shut behind him and Polly, but he was careless of the noise, and of his car left beside the road. It was too late for concealment.

"We've been clear around the outside row of graves," he said. "Now we'll make a smaller circle." Far off in his mind was astonishment that he could still think out a campaign, that he had strength to push himself once more into the lanes between those misshapen stumps of marble.

The torch and the lantern were still bright. He set off, directing the torch beam from side to side, heedless of Polly's gasping breath as she tried to keep up with him. The rain had slackened to a drizzle. After a few moments it was no more than a stinging, muffling mist, settling down gently so that he could see only a few yards ahead. He went on, cursing under his breath.

'Rod!' said Polly's voice behind him, high and sharp. 'Over there!'

He started to turn. His foot twisted beneath him and he pitched forward, almost onto his face. He sat for a moment, grunting and wordlessly fighting back shock. The pain in his ankle was brief but intense. His hand went down to rub at the ache, then reached out to find the tiny object that had turned under his foot, throwing him off balance. A mind trained in anatomy automatically classified the dry bone as a child's metacarpal. A mind driven by terror and pressure classified the fact and forgot it as his hand slipped the bone into a coat pocket.

"Rod!" Polly called again.

The fall had confused his sense of direction. He found himself gazing off to where the white angel of the Tyloe mausoleum hovered in the gloom. Then another, almost hysterical "Rod!" and he had found Polly.

Her torch pointed to the right. She was running, stumbling toward a plot that lay just within sight of the caretaker's cottage. When he reached her she was already at work, feverishly casting aside the loose squares of turf that covered a mounded grave.

"I'll do the digging," he said. "Hold the light."

"No need to hold it." She set the lantern on the top of a high headstone, bent to seize her shovel, and paused.

"That noise—that was a door slamming. A house door."

Barratt straightened, and cursed again. It was true; someone was coming from the direction of the cottage, carrying a light that bobbed and jerked erratically as though the person carrying it constantly stumbled and righted himself. It wound through the paths, coming nearer: a nimbus of luminous mist with a softly brilliant core.

"Polly," said Barratt urgently, "grab the lantern, get it away from here as fast as you can, don't let him know what we've been doing. That's old Hummel; and we've been digging up his granddaughter's grave."



## DONNA MARIE PARKS

Beloved Granddaughter of

Franz Hummel

"As for the light of mine eyes,  
it also is gone from me."

I GUESS I was about five when Mother and I left San Francisco and came up here to Red Forks to live with Grandpa Hummel. She wasn't awfully strong, and she was scared she'd die and leave me all alone, and Gramp had said he'd take her back after my father deserted us. About the only thing I remember about the time when I was real little was the look of our flat, with high rooms and funny long windows; but maybe I'm mixed up even about that, because Gramp's little house had rooms and windows just like them. The only difference was his garden, beautiful and neat with everything growing just so.

I used to wish I could remember more, because I never left Red Forks again. Never, never for the rest of my life.

It was all right when I was small. I loved it, playing

in the yard or roller-skating on the sidewalks under the big trees; it was cool there on a summer day, like a long green tunnel. Gramp was all right, too. I was proud of him, marching along down the street, stout and red-faced and holding himself up straight, and all the most important people in town saying hello to him when they met. Of course I simply loved the bakery, and being able to take my friends in and get free cookies for them. It would have made me popular even if nothing else had.

Mother never talked much after we came to Red Forks. When she did say anything it was in a kind of tired voice as if she couldn't be bothered to pretend. It must have been just after we came that I heard Gramp shouting one night out in the kitchen: "He should be shot! If I saw him I would kill him myself! There should be punishment for men who bring disgrace on innocent people!" And then Mother answering him, flat and dull: "He was no good, I suppose, but then I knew that when I married him." Gramp said: "But why did you do it, then, Marie? Why?" in a quieter voice, but still angry and puzzled-sounding. Mother didn't say anything. I was playing with my doll in the dining-room, and I can remember yet how long it was before Gramp came out, scowling and not seeing me. He'd been waiting for her to answer, I guess.

She talked to me sometimes, but she got quieter and quieter as time went on, and just worked hard. She used to make the pies and cakes the bakery sold. Gramp had some kind of catarrh that made him cough and blow his nose all the time, so he couldn't do the baking himself. He had a man who made bread and rolls and Mother did the rest. Gramp just kept an eye on things and counted the money. It wasn't an awful lot, prob-

ably, the bakery was small and there was a big chain grocery in town that had things shipped in cheaper.

It wasn't such a bad life, then. Gramp could get awful stern, but Mother stood up for me. Once I'd done something bad, and he blew his top.

"When I was a child," he said, looking square and solid and his face red, "my father whipped us every Saturday night, two hard strokes for each bit of wrongdoing during the week. We learned to be careful, I can tell you. Donna Marie could learn also."

I remember feeling kind of sick, and trying to figure out how long it was till Saturday, but Mother said: "Your father was German-born and you are American. I've punished Donna already. Now it should be forgotten."

"But she should remember! Forgetting, and doing it again, and forgetting again—that does not make a fine woman." He looked at me, not angry any more, but still stiff and solid. "Our little girl must grow up to be a credit to us, upright and modest so that she can be a good wife."

I said in a shaky voice: "I'm learning to cook and keep house, Grampa."

"I know you are," he said, and reached out to stroke my hair, as if he hadn't meant to but couldn't help it. "Well, Marie, for this time we will say no more."

I never stopped to wonder what would happen if Mother wasn't there to take my part. I just kept on growing out of my dresses and trying to learn fractions, and walking home from school with my arm around my chum. When I got a little older, though, I began thinking about the world outside of Red Forks, and wanting to see it again.

Gramp was just death on taking trips away. He thought women ought to stay in their own homes. He

didn't even want me to go to Sacramento one time when my whole history class was going on an excursion, to see a museum or something; and when Mother insisted, he said: "Unfortunately things happen when young girls leave the shelter and care their parents give them."

That was the only time—I will say—that I ever heard him say anything about her; she'd run away to marry my father, I knew by that time. She came back at him: "You will be very wise, Father, if you give Donna more freedom than you allowed me." Her voice was still tired and flat, but it seemed to hit him, somehow. He looked at her kind of bewildered, and then he began to bluster.

"But I was right!" he said, getting madder with every word. "These young people, why must they always be convinced their elders are mistaken? Blame, always blame for the parent!" He blew his nose and scowled, and began yelling. "It was *in spite* of my vigilance that you met that worthless liar, that devil, and I could have saved you from him if—"

"Never mind, Father." Mother could see me listening bug-eyed. "You've been very good to us since I brought Donna home," she finished, in a voice you could hardly hear.

I didn't get to Sacramento anyway, because I got sick the day of the excursion; but I wasn't too upset, it was only an old museum, and I thought then that there'd be other chances. I wish now I could have gone.

It's funny, those two or three bits of talk are all I remember in the years Mother was alive, the only times I ever heard her and Gramp really talk—not just saying words about mending his blue suit, or what kind of pies to make for the week-end trade. Or maybe I

remember just those because they were mostly about me. If I'd thought about it, I'd have said Gramp didn't really care much about Mother

Then I was twelve, and she died. I cried, of course, just buckets at the time, and every night for a long while after, but what was almost a worse shock for me was that Gramp cried too— a big old man like that, sobbing, and all bent over and looking kind of small. It scared me nearly to death.

In the middle of it he looked around and saw me. He put out a hand, still all shaky and tears running down his face, and said 'We will take care of each other now, my little girl. You shall make my home for me, and I shall watch over you. We will be the family, until some good man comes to ask for you.'

He always talked like that, like somebody reading aloud out of a book.

I said 'Just you and me, Gramp.'

'Yes, we shall not need anyone else. Already you are a fine little housekeeper. I was too. Mother had taught me, she said I owed it to Gramp. It made me kind of proud to think of running the house all by myself, and an orphan and everything. I was wearing black, too. All the kids at school thought it was romantic.'

For a minute, then, I almost forgot that we'd buried Mother up in the old cemetery. Of course, afterward I kept remembering, until my black dress was worn out, and I was in high school, and really a grown woman. And then it was queer the way I started thinking about her, not the way she was when I'd known her, but kind of like we'd been together when she was younger and ran away. I knew, more and more, how she'd felt.

But Gramp never would understand. He'd try, for a minute, and I'd think he was almost like Lewis Stone in the Hardy family movies, kind but firm, only not looking much like him. The trouble was he didn't stay reasonable.

There wasn't much money, well all right; there'd certainly be enough to get me to Hollywood and I could get a job as a car-hop, anybody could do that work; and then I'd be in a position to have some big director notice me. Of course I didn't expect to go right into the movies, but when they discover a new star they give her training. Jean Tyloe and I had our plans made. There wasn't anything silly about it, everybody said I was a lot like Rita Hayworth, and Jean was kind of like Alice Faye—not so much, though.

But Gramp just raved. I can't remember all the things he said, they were terrible; "idiot nonsense" was one of them. He finished up by saying that, big as I was, he'd whip me if I ever mentioned the idea to anyone in town, he'd be disgraced. So that was no good. I used to work in the bakery early evenings and Saturday mornings, and he paid me a little for it. I thought I'd save up and get away myself; only the money kept going for cokes and things.

Gramp might have made me work longer hours, if it hadn't been for Mrs. Quigley. She was just lovely, she'd come around after Mother died and said she wanted to take charge of choosing my clothes, and so I always had what everybody else did. He'd listen to her. She was one of the Tyloes, the most important family in town. I asked her once to get after him about sending me away, but she just smiled and said to wait till I was older.

The war came along and changed everything—every single thing except the way I felt about leaving Red Forks, and that got worse.

To begin with, Gramp had been talking about Germany for a couple of years before, in a kind of admiring way. Hitler had done an awful lot for the country, he said, and the young people were really learning about discipline under him. He thought the business about the Sudeten was all right, too. Lots of people did, only the way Gramp talked seemed a lot more approving, somehow. After we got in the war, he shut up and looked worried. "I remember how it was in the first war," he said. "We were persecuted because my father had come from the old country; and we had done nothing, nothing!"

I don't know whether it was happening this time, or not. He thought it was. If somebody forgot to nod to him on the street, or if there was a slow day at the bakery, Gramp would begin again about how he was innocent but everybody would blame him. It got tiresome, and I thought I knew how to fix it, to let everybody know we were loyal.

But my gosh, Gramp blew his top again when I told him. Me, join the WACS? Had I taken leave of my senses? He brought in a lot of stuff about how I was only fifteen. Well, that could have been fixed easy enough. All he had to do was tell people I was eighteen, in some place where nobody knew us. I was tall, and goodness knows I was developed.

I said patiently, "I'm a woman, Gramp. You don't seem to realize that." It just set him off worse.

Other people knew it, if he didn't. Boys had always liked me, but now some of the older men were begin-

ning to look at me in that special way—men like Johnny Swanholm, who was over twenty and had taken over the bread and rolls when the other baker left. I never paid much attention to Johnny, he was awfully shy, and he came from the Shacks so even if he'd got up the nerve to ask me for a date, Gramp probably wouldn't have stood for it. I could tell how he felt, though, and it just shows you.

We hadn't been in the war for very long before Johnny left to join the Marines, and there wasn't any way to keep on with the bakery. The only baker we could have got was named Steinberg, and he said: "Me, work for a kraut?" He'd heard about Gramp's remarks before the war, I guess. Of course Gramp thought that was more persecution; he went on about it for days, but it didn't get us another baker. Gramp talked about hiring out as a gardener, and I couldn't make it out until Mrs. Quigley talked to me.

I was awfully surprised to find out there wasn't much to live on. Gramp never would say anything about business to me, of course, but it seemed he'd been borrowing on the cottage, and the bakery building wasn't his at all, and we were going to be poor. I always thought German people were supposed to be so thrifty.

"He's never denied you anything, Donna dear," Mrs. Quigley said. She was always kind-looking, but there was a sadness to her face and she seemed kind of behind a glass wall all the time, even when she was being nicest to me. "I offered to let you have some of my clothes, but your grandfather wouldn't hear of it. I was to choose new ones, and he paid for them. He has always had great pride." I said: "But to go out working as a gardener—I" and Mrs. Quigley said: "He can do that and keep his self-respect. There are so many worse

things than good labor with one's hands." She looked queer for a moment; and then she finished: "Of course, your Gramp has always had a wonderful hand for plants."

That was in the end and the next spring she died. Oh, I wish she hadn't died, I wish she hadn't! She wouldn't have let Gramp do what he did, she'd have found some way out.

It was then that the awful part began. I'd had another idea about getting away, and doing something—just anything—to help the war effort. I don't mean just rolling dismal old bandages, there were plenty of older women who could do that; there had to be something that I could do especially well. Everybody said that what the boys overseas wanted most of anything was to look at pretty young women, and the USO was sending groups over all the time, and I figured I could do something with them. I could sing a little, but probably they didn't care how well you sang. There wasn't any business of talking it over with Gramp this time, I knew better than that. I stowed away in the car of some people who were going down to the Bay. I thought once I was down there I'd work it somehow.

Well, they caught me before we started.

Gramp went on just like always, about disgrace, and he hadn't been vigilant enough, and all the stuff, but this time he didn't take it out in raving. He told me what we were going to do, and when I finally believed him I went all to pieces.

He was going to be caretaker of the old cemetery, way up out of town, and take care of the plants and lawns; he'd have to dig graves, too, but there was a kind of half-witted man they hired to help on jobs like that. The horrible part of it was, we had to *live* up there, in

a cottage that the caretaker got rent-free—live by the cemetery, with nobody within miles but a couple of old farmers, no streets or movies, none of my friends—

"You can't do it to me, you can't," I said, though I was crying so I could hardly talk. "I've got a right to my own life!"

"You have no right to bring disgrace upon our name. There has been too much talk of freedom. Donna, my little girl, you are so very young yet. Until you are grown, I must keep you near me."

I forgot all about my pride, and cried harder and clutched at him. "If I'm young, I've got to see somebody else young, and I never will, up there—never. I can't stand it!"

"You do not understand, Donna. I have no wish to torture you. If your friends of good family wish to come there, if the young men wish to visit you in your own home with your grandfather near, they may do it. But this cannot go on, my little girl, these wild and headstrong and unwise acts." He shook his head, still looking at me kind of sadly. "The youth of today, in America! You would not find such lack of discipline in Germany. Even though we are at war with them, one must see the good things in their system."

Nothing I could say would make him change his mind. We came up here in the early summer.

My friends were pretty decent, they drove out sometimes for a picnic, but there wasn't enough gasoline for them to do it often. There weren't any young men visiting. Most of them had gone to war, and anyway it would have been terrible in that awful little parlor with our old things crowding it, and Gramp sitting right beyond the open archway to the dining-room, coughing

and rustling his paper and blowing his nose kind of slowly and pompously. There were days and days in that summer when all I heard was the sound of Gramp's lawn mower going back and forth, back and forth over the graves, or the chugging of his truck when he moved earth or plants from one place to another.

I didn't look out the windows on the cemetery side, much. I looked across the road at the place where the old church had been fifty years before. There was an old stone wall there, and Gramp had planted some little young trees against it. I used to watch them whipping back and forth in a dusty wind, in the late afternoon: just thin limber little sticks, bowing down almost to the ground and then coming up again, in a yellowish sort of light.

It was in August that Mrs. George Lyloe, Jean's mother, came all the way out here, to get Gramp to let me go to a dance at the Grange hall. She said I had to have some pleasure, and she was chaperoning the girls herself and would keep an eye on me. Gramp respected her, too. He gave in after a while.

I behaved at the dance, all right, but it was there that I saw Johnny Swanholm for the first time in a year.

The girls were all bowled over. He'd left town a big, gangling blond man who was too shy to speak to a girl without getting red in the face. He was still big and blond, but not so shy; and that dull green uniform the Marines wore, and the medals and things on his chest that meant he was an expert marksman, made an awful lot of difference.

They all wanted him, but it was me he danced with the most. I had on the yellow and gray print that was

one of the last things Mrs. Quigley had picked out, and everybody said it did things for me.

Johnny talked along, lots freer than he used to. He was lonesome; his mother had died just before he enlisted, and his sisters had moved away off somewhere. He was in Red Forks just on a seventy-two hour leave, he said he "wanted to see the old town again before—" and broke off short.

"That means they're shipping you out, Johnny?" I breathed carefully. He didn't say anything, but grinned and swung me around. His dancing wasn't wonderful, but better than you'd expect.

"You know," he began talking again after a while, "I thought it'd be kind of good to come home, have something to remember while I was away. It's funny, though, just the town itself don't seem like enough to be—homesick for."

"There's nobody at all that belongs to you, Johnny?" I said softly. He shook his head. "We're all terribly glad to see you, and proud of you, you know that."

He said: "You're awful nice, but it isn't the same."

We danced for a few minutes. Little by little it was coming to me, what I could do, what I had to do. He was a hero, or going to be one, and they were shipping him out to fight right away. . . . There was a part for me, after all; if I couldn't make life happier for lots of the boys in the forces, I could for one of them. And I knew how he'd always felt about me.

He looked awfully surprised when I told him, talking into his ear while we danced. For a while he didn't get it at all; he said that hadn't been what he meant, and then he kept saying that there wouldn't be time to marry me; and of course that wasn't the point, that

part didn't matter. It was one of the things you learned from all the stories and the movies: they said that one night was better than nothing, that it meant so much.

...

After a while he said: "Well, sure, if that's the way you want it, Donna." And then he got sort of red, and his eyes took on a funny shine. We fixed it up, talking and laughing all the time so Mrs. Tyloe wouldn't suspect anything. It wouldn't be hard—there was an old road behind the cemetery that hardly anyone ever used because it was hard on cars, but he could get up it. If I went out real late Gramp wouldn't hear me. He generally took a few drinks in the evening, now. And it was dark enough there in the cemetery, under the willows.

There was that night, after Mrs. Tyloe took me home all safe, from the dance; and there was the next night.

I didn't really like it very much, but I thought of my country, and all the boys who were fighting for America and for me.

I knew what might happen, and it did. It happened before high school started in late September. It scared me a little, but I was kind of proud, too; and that helped when I began to feel sick.

But that was when Gramp found out. I didn't lie to him, I told him everything about it.

For a minute I was kind of sorry for him. He sat down slowly, in a hard chair, and somehow he looked smaller than I'd ever seen him. He said in a kind of whisper: "How can it be? How can this happen to me?"

I started to tell him all the things I'd been thinking up, because I knew it would be okay once he under-

stood, it was what they did in Germany, all the girls knew it was expected of them, and they weren't ashamed and neither was I. In the middle of it I saw he wasn't listening, he got up and fetched some paper and said: 'You will write it once to this—this man, tell him that I will force him to come back here.'

Of course Johnny was overseas by that time, I told Gramp so and that he wouldn't get the letter for ages, and couldn't possibly get back even if they'd let him, for a year or two years. Gramp just shoved the pen into my hand. I looked up at him curiously, because he wasn't shouting at all.

I was afraid of him, afraid of the look in his eyes, for the first time in my life.

He hardly spoke to me for two weeks though I'd written the letter just the way he said though I kept talking to him, trying to make him understand. But he never did understand. He just sat looking in front of him when he was in the house. It was awful.

Then one day he got up all of a sudden and said: 'Perhaps it is not too late. Perhaps no one needs to know. Get your coat, Donna Marie.'

I didn't know what he meant to do until we got to town and he pushed me ahead of him up the stairs to Dr. Barrett's office. It felt like something being burned into my mind: the smell of the drug store on the first floor, and the feel of the rubber carpeting on the stairs. It seemed then there couldn't be anything worse.

The doctor took me in the next room and made an examination and then he said there wasn't much doubt about it, though the business was in its early stages. Gramp said: 'Fair? Then you can do something!' And the doctor looked at him hard, and said: 'I can see Donna through her pregnancy, Mr. Hummel. She is

young, and physically perfect. Anything else would be impossible."

I said, kind of hoarsely: "I won't have an abortion. I didn't know what Gramp had in mind. What I did—I *meant* to do."

"You will," Gramp said. "You must. He must help us."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hummel," the doctor said, "but even if Donna herself wanted it, it's forbidden by law and by ethics."

Gramp sat there beside me, with the doctor across the desk from us, sitting still and listening and looking sorry. Gramp looked small still, and his face hadn't got red this time, it was a queer grayish color. I guess the doctor didn't see his eyes, he kept them half shut. He talked and talked in a loud, hard voice, about being persecuted, and the doctor helping other people but not him—until the doctor told him there might be someone in the waiting room, then he was quieter.

"I have never helped anyone in that way, Mr. Hummel," the doctor said. "I cannot do it in this case." He still looked at both of us as if he was sorry, but his mouth closed tight after he finished.

We went away, finally. Gramp talked all the way back to the cottage, in that loud voice. He would take me to the city or somewhere, he said, only there was no money and we didn't know anybody there. Maybe someone would marry me— "But what good man would have you now?" he said in a kind of groan, and drove the truck into the shed and we got out. He took me by the arm and pulled me round. "You should be there, I would rather see you *there* than like this," he said, and pointed across the graves to our lot where Mother was buried.

There were five weeks of it.

At first it was only at night; then, when the winter rains began, he did it in the daytime too. He would sit down by me whenever I was, and say: "Now we will talk." I'd try to shut my ears, but his voice would go on and on, droning out horrible things. I'd tried to be proud; now I wasn't, I was down so deep in shame that it was like the quicksand down the river, it sucked at me till I couldn't get out. He talked on and on, an hour at a time, while the rains kept on and the cottage was all full of a dead half-light. I remembered the summer, how I'd thought there couldn't be anything lonelier than the sound of the lawn mower and the look of those little thin whips of trees. This was worse I wouldn't tell him how dreadful I felt; I set my jaw and kept still. We were there in that little house, hating each other, and Gramp hating Johnny and the doctor too. There'd be four months more of winter.

Of course there hadn't been any answer from Johnny. Early in November we knew there wouldn't be; he'd been killed at Bougainville. I suppose I'd felt that if he did write and had promised to marry me after the war Gramp might let up a little, but this just finished it. Gramp started reading the Bible aloud at me. He hadn't ever been very religious, but he knew how to find all the most horrible places.

One day he hurt his foot and I knew he couldn't go out. I got him some food and then I put on my coat and grabbed the car keys.

'Where are you going?' he shouted at me. "Not to show your face in town?"

"I'm going to the doctor's," I told him. "You can't keep me from that."

I did go, but not to see Dr. Barratt. Old Dr. Whit-

tleby wasn't practicing any more, but I thought he might do something, I didn't know what; and maybe people would think I was just paying him a friendly call because he'd been sick.

He still looked sick. He sat in a big old black leather chair and listened to me. I couldn't think very well by this time, for crying, for not wanting to remember things.

"So it caught you, too," he said when I was through. He had a thin voice with a rasp to it, and the minute he spoke I knew I shouldn't have come. He felt the same as Gramp did and he began to tell me about it.

"I don't need to listen," I said in a kind of shriek. "I know how vile I am, I know nobody'll ever speak to me again, why do you have to tell me all over again? Just do something!"

"What do you want me to do?"

At first I'd thought I would have the baby. Now—"I want to get rid of it," I said. "Just anything, any way, to have this over with."

"You would like me to operate?" Dr. Whittleby said, very softly, but still with that harsh sound in his voice. "But even if it were permitted—even if it were not dangerous—how could I?" He held out his hand, and I looked at it, feeling sick. It was thin and awfully old-looking, and it was shaking all the time, jerk, jerk, jerk. "I couldn't do much for you, could I?"

I shook my head. It seemed as if I couldn't stop looking at his hand. "I guess not. But—you're a doctor, you must know something—I can't stand it, not any longer, I'm sick all the time and I can't sleep, and in another month it'll be snowing up there. Please—I'd go on my knees to you, if you'd help—"

"No need," said Dr. Whittleby. "We will see. It

would take time to arrange for you to go away. In the meantime, perhaps we can help your nerves a little. Yes, perhaps we can." He pulled himself out of his chair, slowly, with his eyes on me. "I can still prescribe—something for the insomnia."

He got a bottle out of a cabinet in the office, and spilled some white pills into a little box. Some of them fell out and I watched how carefully his shaky hand picked them up. "One of these each night," he said, "and no more. You would not take more than one, of course. That would be dangerous."

He held out the box. The tablets were small, and there were a lot of them. He was smiling, in a funny sort of way, and he looked at me sharply while I put the box in my coat pocket. Then he held the door open for me, into the dusky waiting room. "That's absolutely all I can do for you, Donna," he said. "More than I should do." He began again about how I was never to take more than one, but I was looking at a dark corner, where somebody was getting out of a chair. I wasn't thinking what I said, my only idea was to keep Phil Whittleby, the doctor's son, from knowing what was wrong with me.

He spoke to me, so nice and smiling, the way people used to. I answered something I don't know what, and pulled my coat around me though I knew nothing showed yet. I had to get out. Maybe if I could get back to the cottage, and get a good night's sleep, I'd be able to stand things better.

But that night Cramp read the Bible aloud again. It was queer, when he read it wasn't all about bad women, it was mostly Job and things like that, men suffering and not deserving it. I knew what I'd done to him. I

could guess what his life and mine would be like from now on.

It was Job this time. While he read I looked at him straight, and he met my eyes for the first time in all those weeks, and I knew what it was that made him look so queer and why I had been frightened of him. Maybe nobody else would realize it, but he was just on the edge of being crazy.

He'd told me plainly enough what I should do, and so had Dr. Whittleby. So I got ready for bed and put on my best nightgown and took all of the pills. I heard the clink of the bottle and glass in the next room and Gramp coughing and blowing; and then before long I didn't hear any noises at all.

I was six years old, roller skating down a long cool tunnel of shade, on the sidewalk in Red Forks. Then the tunnel got darker, its walls were made of stone, and my skates were carrying me along too fast—

There was a sharp jab in some part of me that had been left behind down at the end of the tunnel, somebody was shaking the world; and far off, booming as if there was an echo, I heard a voice shouting: "Donna Marie! My little girl. Donna Marie!" and wild sort of crying, like Gramp had done when my mother died. "I did not mean this to happen!"

The shaking went on, happening to somebody that wasn't me, and the voice kept on breaking and booming in the dark. There was a light far off at the end of the tunnel, I thought; it got bigger and smaller and bigger—and there was another voice, only I couldn't hear what it said.

Gramp was shouting again. "You will save her, do you hear me? You, you did this! You would not help

her, no, and it drove her to this —and you put the poison in her hands!"

The other voice sounded, and now with the little bit of me that was left in that body I knew something was wrong. It wasn't a thin raspy voice — it was deep—

I tried to call out. I had to get it out somehow, because I was the only one who knew about Job and that look in Gramp's eyes. With all my strength I willed him to hear me. 'No Gramp, not *this* doctor!'

I listened for it to take its place among the echoes. And not a sound came out.

Instead the voices faded away and the light at the end of the tunnel faded too and I was still carried along fast— too fast for anyone to stop me.

## THE MARBLE FOREST

X • 11 00 P M to 11 20 P M

RODNEY BARRATT walked quickly toward the moving light. His torch was pointed like a weapon; its beam struck the shifting mist and flattened there, or now and then suddenly shot out into a patch of clear air. It was in one of these moments that it found the indistinct figure among the gravestones and the other torch blazed suddenly into Barratt's eyes.

The two men stood in a narrow tree-arched aisle between graves, each impaled on the other's shaft of light, frozen like deer in a woods road. Old Hummel

blinked reddened eyes. He had shrunk to thinness in the years since Barratt had last seen him, and his once-respectable dark suit hung upon him fantastically.

He said: "The doctor?" in an oddly blurred version of his pompous voice; and then repeated in a shout: "The doctor! So it was you who ran from me in the twilight, but you have come back, I have caught you now!"

The torch was in his right hand. In the crook of the other arm something rested, its long barrel dully gleaming.

Barratt said: "At twilight? I wasn't here then, but I was here an hour—two hours ago. It was after dark." He thought, make it sound legal—and added: "Dr. Whittlby and Jim Tylor were with me."

"In the dark, an hour ago. But I was gone then," Hummel said. "I went to the Alsopp ranch, to get this." He lifted the rifle an inch or so, and Barratt thought: "That, and a dose of Dutch courage."

"This is to defend my place here," the old man said, "to drive out those who should not come; because that other time I had no weapon."

"Mr. Hummel"—Barratt's voice was hoarse—"who was it you saw in the twilight?"

The old man opened his lips as if to answer, and then closed them again. He peered at Barratt with a crafty tilt of the head. "Who, how should I know who? Coming home as I did from the town—"

"Where—where were they?"

"By the m—" Hummel broke off. "You, you—why do you ask me questions, you who should not dare to show me your face?"

Barratt took a step forward. "I've lost something of great value," he said as quietly as he could, "here in the

cemetery. We were looking for it earlier this evening, and we've come back now. It has to be found, Mr. Hummel, and at once."

He waited for the old man to say "What is it?" and wondered if he dared tell him—but instead Hummel muttered: "Who are we?"

Barratt glanced over his shoulder, and twitched with a slight shock. He had thought that Polly was standing silently, just behind him. She was nowhere to be seen. At some distance behind the electric lantern burned, a blot of brightness in the mist, low and unmoving. She must have set it down on the path. Then, without it, she couldn't be off hunting or digging by herself.

"My friends and I," he said. "We tried to consult you, we knew that you had better knowledge of the cemetery than any of us, you see everything that goes on here. There would be a generous reward, Mr. Hummel, if you could help us, a large reward—"

He was talking almost at random, searching the lowering face for any sign of comprehension. If the torturer were Gramp Hummel himself, was there a chance of buying him off? If he were innocent, could he be bribed to help—or was that old hate too vivid still, would the man laugh at him, delight in thwarting him? Even as his voice ran on, he thought "*Every minute we talk I'm being delayed.*" He said: "We must find it, Mr. Hummel. Have any of your graves been—disturbed, since late today? We have reason to believe that this—this object was hidden here—" Suddenly his dreadful urgency broke through into his voice: "God, man, you must help, you don't know what it means! You saw that person who was here at dusk, tell me who it was! If I knew, if I could find him, I'd force it out of him!"

Hummel's face, through the luminous mist, had re-

mained beast blank, only his eyes, oddly glinting, had shifted back and forth. Now, suddenly, his lips stretched back over uneven teeth. He reached his arm to a tree that hung half over the path and set his flashlight, still shining on Barratt, in the crook of a branch. He had both hands for the rifle, and his grizzled head was lowered. Never mind Doctor, he said. 'No more of your lies, no more of this thing of value you have lost. Those were your tools, your spade and pick, beside the Whittleby grave, nor you have been digging.'

He spat out the last word as if it had fouled his mouth. His feet began a slow shuffle forward and Barratt, seeing the rifle barrel come up, retreated a long step. 'No, no, I swear I haven't, but I must know *who else* was digging here, late this

You swear? Look at your knees, look at the earth on your shoes and sleeves!

Barratt's retreat had shifted the beam of light from his face to his body. He looked down in a vague horror at the betraying signs as the old man's voice rose louder. 'There was no grave dug here but the Whittleby one - until tonight! And I know where you were at work, murderer, grave-robber!' His voice cracked. 'You can not even let her rest! I should have killed you then, when we stood by her dead body and I did not! I let you live to come here and desecrate her grave. Yes, now I am sure where your lights were when I looked from the window, and what you were doing, you - you foulest devil outside of hell! They were *there* -'

Hummel, for God's sake, listen to me. It's my little girl that I'm looking for, she -'

Your little girl? Hummel shrieked. His body tensed, and Rodney Barratt suddenly knew that there was danger before him, the danger of a wrecked, un-

reasoning mind. He cast one look around; he could dodge the circle of light from Hummel's torch, but behind him, across his only way of escape, shone the lantern that would make a black target of his body. He was still holding his own torch; he had no other weapon, not so much as a spade . . .

"Now I shall kill you, yes," said Hummel in a deadly soft tone, and swung up the rifle.

And then from the depths of the mist beyond them came a high, thin, anguished voice. "Graamp," it wailed, "Gra-amp, I'm herel"

For one second Hummel's head jerked aside, the rifle wavered; and in that second Rodney Barratt flung his heavy flashlight at the old man's face. The rifle went off with a sharp crack, harmlessly into the trees, and fell. Barratt was upon it as Hummel wavered back, hands to face. He came up from his crouch to see a nose and chin streaming blood, and furious eyes blazing as the old man lurched toward him.

He swung the rifle like a club, and Franz Hummel slumped backward onto the path and was still.

Barratt stood looking down at him, taking in great rasping gulps of air. For a minute there was nothing in his mind but far off crazy echoes. Then he gave his head a violent shake, and stepped to the tree for Hummel's torch. He shone it upon the prostrate form, knelt, felt expertly about the bruised head. "Polly!" he called over his shoulder.

She came from behind a massive headstone. "Did you have to kill him?" she asked in a small voice.

"I didn't—he's not dead yet, anyway." He got to his feet. "Still breathing, but we can't leave him here, with his face in the water. Help me lift him, will you? And go ahead with the flashlight." He had the flabby

weight across his shoulders. Panting under it, he shuffled at a half-run along the path. The flashlight danced ahead of him, up the two or three steps to the small covered porch of Hummel's cottage. He dumped the body to the floor, and stood up sweating. For a moment Polly's face swam before him in a blur; when his vision cleared he saw its look of fear and anxiety.

"Is—is that all you're going to do? *You?*" she said.

"Are you thinking of me as a doctor, now?" he said roughly, already moving in long strides toward the path. "You think I'd stop to give him first aid, a madman who was going to kill me?" He flicked a look sideways. "Smart girl, Polly, that was a good trick. It even had me going for half a second. I didn't know why you'd disappeared."

She said, hurrying along beside him: "I thought at first I might sneak around and grab the gun, but it was too light. Then I just hid—until I guessed what he meant to do."

He started to speak, and then changed his mind. They were at Donna's grave again. Best only to dig now, not to voice the fruitless arguments that went back and forth in his head. "I'm half crazy myself," he thought, and drove the spade into earth. But even as its first arc was finished and it came down again, his mind went racing on uncontrollably.

Had Hummel really seen the criminal in the twilight? Because if he knew who it was, and was now unconscious and perhaps dying—he, Barratt, had flung away one of his few chances.

If Gramp were the criminal, would he have violated his own granddaughter's grave? Never, said Barratt to himself, *never*.

But—it couldn't be Gramp; because the person who

had taken Marjorie had done it to torture her father, he would want to watch or to imagine every moment of that agony; and Gramp had meant to kill him right then, before he could suffer longer. . . .

So it couldn't be Gramp—and the baby might still be here, in this grave.

And then one more thought struck him. "Polly," he said, "Now you've heard Gramp Hummel talking, that precise manner of his—could he have been the voice on the telephone?"

She straightened and looked at him. "It—it *could* have been."

Once more they bent to their work.

## **XI • 11.25 P.M. to 11.45 P.M.**

THE mist had grown so thick that big sparse drops fell from the weeping willow that brooded above the burial plot, and beat an uneven tattoo on the mud-streaked coffin in Donna Parks's grave. Under the beam of a flashlight Barratt and Polly examined the edges anxiously, their bent heads almost touching, their faces blotched and sagging with the strain of weariness and uncertainty; but the unbroken line of white mold in the cracks proved beyond doubt that this coffin was old and unopened.

Barratt climbed out after Polly. He picked up his

shovel again, scraped at the loose wet soil that had been flung out as they dug, and almost absently pushed a little over the edge of the hole. For a moment his mouth was too tight and dry to speak. He battled with an increasing sense of hopelessness that had begun to drain his strength: another failure—and another—how many before time ran out and it no longer mattered? And yet—“We’d better rest five minutes,” he said at last, “and think where to look next.” Polly Neale nodded.

There was something about this earth that nagged at his memory, something that might or might not have a meaning. He was too torn by strain to hunt down the elusive thought. Old Hummel—grave digging—something about that?

“Polly,” he said in the flat voice that didn’t sound like his own, “have you noticed—there’s a sort of pattern about the places that we’ve found—or been led to? I don’t know if it means anything, or what we could make of it, but—old Whittleby blames me for his son’s death, and Grand Hummel never was convinced that it wasn’t I who gave Donna those narcotic pills. It’s as if I were meant to be reminded—” His voice trailed off as if the thought still escaped him.

Polly, sitting on the wet ground to catch her breath, looked up at him briefly and then began to scrape heavy mud from her goloshes.

Rodney Barratt passed a muddy sleeve across his forehead. He gazed out vaguely into the misty darkness that pressed on the circle of light. “A pattern—but Alice doesn’t fit into it! What was in that crazy mind when it led us to her grave? She had nothing in common with these others—except that she’s dead. Why must I be reminded of *her*?”

There was a catch in Polly's heavy breathing. She said in a quick, strained voice: "I don't know."

His head came round. When you say it like that, I think you *do* know something. Polly—look at me!"

In the dim light her face was as pale and hard as one of the marble angels'. "Skip it, Rod, you don't want to hear."

"I want to hear anything that might resolve that pattern, and *you're going to tell me!*"

Her dark eyes wavered and dropped. "Maybe—" she said reluctantly, 'maybe someone feels—about Alice—the way old Doc and Gramp felt "

"You don't mean—blaming me for her death?"

"Yes!"

He almost laughed. People say I killed my own wife? I, a doctor, murdering someone I loved?" She kept her eyes averted. After one incredulous moment he caught at her shoulder, looking into her face. "Polly, did you believe that?"

'No, no! I didn't think that you—poisoned her physically. Not that it's unheard of—there have been physicians who were poisoners—but that's not the kind of doctor you are." She twisted away from him.

"What do you mean, not physically?" A dull spark of anger began to glow, down inside him. He stood with his head bent low, forcing her to look at him.

"All right, if you've got to have it!" Her eyes came up. "Isn't it possible Alice didn't want to live because she knew what had been going on, what you'd been doing while she was ill? Don't try to look blank! The whole town knew you were in love with—"

Barnatt looked at her incredulously, seeing her mouth snap shut in an unbecoming line. "So you think

"I'm that much of a heel?" he said grimly. "We'll pass over the insult to Sylvia, for the moment. You've never been fair where she's concerned."

"I respect you as a doctor," Polly snapped. "What you do as a man is none of my business, but I've a right to my private opinions!" She scrambled to her feet. "And you can't keep all your life in separate compartments, don't think you can! She'd ruin you as a doctor, just as she's already ruined you as a father—"

"You're quite wrong, you know," said Barratt in a level voice. The spark of anger was spreading, eating at him. "Some other time I'll tell you how wrong. But about the father business—"

Suddenly he caught his breath, looking sharply at her. "You implied that once before, tonight. You said somebody might think Midge was neglected. You think it, don't you?"

"If you force me to say it—yes. I do."

"You talked about it while we were standing by Alice's grave. You stood there talking, talking, when you knew every minute's delay was more torment for me, just as you wasted minutes with Quigley and old Whittleby—as if you wanted me to—" His voice tightened until it twanged like wire. "Polly. Is this whole thing your doing?"

He heard her drag in a deep breath. Then she threw up one hand and struck his face with all her strength. He scarcely felt the blow, though a reflex made him shake his head briefly.

"You think," she said passionately, "that I'd do a hideous thing like this to Marjorie? To that baby, that's worth two of you? I'd cut my hand off before I hurt her or even scared her, and you know it! Oh!"

She caught her breath again in a kind of shriek. "No woman could do that to any child! And that's what you think of *me*!"

"No woman could," he said slowly. "Maybe you're right. But if she isn't hurt—if she's somewhere safe, with Violet? You could have fixed that up!"

"I didn't, I didn't!"

He had her by both shoulders, shaking her. "Polly, Polly, for God's sake say that's it!"

"I wish it were, Lord knows. But why should you think I—"

"Oh, to make me suffer, to teach me a lesson you thought I needed—anything, you've made it plain enough how you feel toward me. Polly—"

"Are you crazy?" she said roughly. "What about that telephone call?"

His grip tightened on her shoulder. "But was there a telephone call?"

"You think I lied about that? Sade heard it ring, she came—"

"It could have been somebody you asked to ring you up. Nobody but you heard the other end of that call!"

"Take your hands off me," said Polly through set teeth. "Do I have to remind you that nobody else came out here to help you, nobody but me?"

The obsession still held him. "If you've got her hidden somewhere, tell me now. I've had all I can take. I'll ask it any way you want. Polly—in the name of God, tell me—"

Her eyes had been unfathomable. Now they softened a little, and a light of speculation began to grow in them. She said quickly: "Rod, wait! Let's forget you thought this about me, I know it's only strain that made you do it. But use the same logic on someone else!

There was a telephone call, on my word of honor, but it might have been arranged! Sade Kushins was upstairs by the extension phone, she could have called someone to give the signal—and left me to take the incoming call.”

“Sade—but she worships Marjorie—”

“Yes. And she worshipped Alice. Who do you suppose started the story that you’d killed your wife? Who’d be glad to see you suffer like this? She hates you, Rod.”

He looked backward at the past. He saw Sade Kushins’s bland, unreadable face, and the disquieting look that she had sometimes given him, that he had always ignored. “Sade,” he said in a whisper. “If it was all a hoax, she could take a confederate! She could even have got someone else to disturb these graves—and she was out of the house when we got there this evening. Polly, you’re right. Come on!” He started down the path.

“Rod, where are you going?”

“To get it out of her, where she’s hidden Marjorie!” He was going toward the car at a half run. Polly caught up with him and fastened her weight onto his arm. “Stop. Listen. Not you, she wouldn’t tell you. I’ll go back to town.” She brought him to a standstill. “It’s horrible to give you that new hope and then take it away again, but—it’s only a chance that I’m right. Haven’t you thought? You can’t afford to lose another minute, if I’m wrong; you have to keep on digging.”

He gave a sharp sigh, and moved his head painfully. “You’re always logical. Polly. I guess it’s lucky you are. Go on.”

He watched her stumbling away between the graves, her shoulders hunched in her sodden raincoat. He stood

motionless until he heard the starter in his car grind, miss, then catch on. He heard her throw in the clutch, and the squeal of the right rear tire when she circled to drive back past the cemetery gates. He was picking up the shovel again when an abrupt stop in the rhythm told him Polly had applied the brakes suddenly. Had she stopped voluntarily or had someone stopped her?

He started toward the road, but then he heard the grind of hasty shifting and the engine picked up again. She could hardly get back in less than an hour. For a moment the evidence against Sade Kushins had seemed overwhelming, and now the surge of hope had let him down once more. Polly's errand would be fruitless, he told himself, as the backwash of despair flooded over him.

Dig, yes. He must dig. But where this time?

## **XII • 11.45 P.M. to 12.35 A.M.**

PAULA NEALE switched on the lights when the engine caught, and turned the car. The strong-light switch was still on from their trip over the obscure road, and the light flared wide, picking up the caretaker's cottage.

She jammed her foot on the brake, leaned out to be sure. The porch *was* bare. Hummel was gone! She glanced back across the graveyard as if undecided whether to go on or return to Barratt with the news:

but when the engine started to miss she shifted gears quickly and drove on past the gates, up and down the twisting road through the hills. There was the washed-out stretch—she slowed carefully for it—and there the last stretch to the highway.

A little past the turn onto the paving, she saw another car speeding toward her along the main road. It looked familiar, in a way that made her glance at it nervously, but the two cars passed with a whine of tires on the wet pavement, so fast that she could not see who was driving. It appeared for a moment in the mirror and vanished. She stepped on the gas clear to the floor boards for the last half mile into Red Forks.

The journey had taken exactly fifteen minutes. Both hands of the clock on the dashboard were at twelve as she switched off the engine and lights and ran up the steps of the doctor's house. The door was unlocked. She stepped into the hall and then paused.

There were two women in the living-room. Facing the hall door stood Sade Kushins; over the other's shoulder her plump face appeared, set and expressionless. The light eyes swept over Polly, seemed to read defeat in her face, and closed for a moment.

The other woman was speaking in a low voice. Every line of the slim back in the Russian broadtail coat, the very tilt of the gold-crowned head in its small black hat, seemed to express urgency. "I know there's something wrong," said Sylvia Stevenson "It's in the way you look, Mrs. Kushins, the way you sounded on the telephone. Dr. Barratt wanted my help. He was worried when he talked to Mitsuki at dinner time. I have a right to know."•

"I had my instructions," said Mrs. Kushins heavily.

"Perhaps she ought to know," said Polly Neale from

the hall, and the blonde woman started and swung around. Polly walked deliberately into the living-room. "Dr. Bariatt," she added, "is at the cemetery. Some madman is supposed to have buried Marjorie in one of the graves."

Sylvia's hand went to her mouth. Her soft face turned deathly white. "No!" she said in a strangled voice. "Oh—*Marjorie!* No one could have done that!"

"I'm beginning to think the same. We've been there for hours, digging, never finding anything. Nobody came to help us. What I—"

"And Rodney's out there?" Sylvia gasped. "You left him *alone*, to do that?" She gathered her coat around her, and started toward the door.

"Don't bother going," said Polly, with a thin edge of contempt in her voice. "What could *you* do?" Sylvia paused, catching her breath, and Polly swung to face Sade Kushins. "What's more, I think Sade knows where Marjorie is."

The bland mask slipped. Sade's eyes narrowed and snapped. "Me? You think I'd harm my own darling? Not even to punish them that God should punish!"

"You wouldn't harm *her*. Where did you take her? Over to your friend Ollie's?"

"I didn't take her anywhere. That Violet—"

"We've only your word for it that Violet ever came here. Nobody saw them together."

Sade fell back nervously, catching at a table. "Violet's disappeared too—"

"Violet Prager?" said Sylvia quickly.

Sade caught her up with sudden bravado. "Yes! Your little friend that you was so kind to, settin' her up and givin' her such highfalutin ideas she was never good for nothin' after. She was here. No matter if that woman

stands there callin' me a liar to my face. Violet was here and took Marjorie away in her car, and said—*they were goin' to your house.*"

The wide-set gray eyes grew dark. Sylvia looked from one face to the other. "And you were taken in by that? Yes. Yes, I see." Her voice went so low as to be almost inaudible. "She's not there, I can assure you. But someone was clever enough to know that—that it sounded plausible, or would sound so to you. Miss Neale, and to Mrs. Kushins."

"Plausible, all right," said Sade Kushins grimly. "And I bet she's not there. You're smart yourself, I'll grant you, Mis' Stevenson. And I'll give you this much—I don't think you'd bury her, the way they said. You got that Violet to pick up Marjorie, and then you hid her in some safe place."

"You're quite absurd, Mrs. Kushins. I'm sorry, but you are. Why on earth should I do that?"

Her voice had not risen, but Sade's did. "So's you can pretend to find her, and make Doctor Rod believe you've done something grand for him—make him believe you really care something about the baby. Then he'd do anything you wanted. go off to the city and start practice there—you think we don't know what you've been tryin' to do to him? You, with your big-town airs and the rich clothes that husband of yours bought you—or you sold yourself for—you that came back here and carried on with somebody whose wife wasn't dead yet --"

"Be quiet," said Sylvia. Her face had gone crimson and then white again. "That is unpardonable."

"And there's no time for it, Sade," said Polly Neale sharply. "You're stalling, trying not to answer my question. Where is Marjorie?"

"I tell you I don't know! Talk about wastin' time, you comin' clear back here with this cock and bull story about me—"

"And Rodney left to bear this alone," Sylvia began again.

Polly Neale's temper went up in a blaze. "You and your 'Rodney, Rodney'! I can tell you he's got no time for love tonight. He's learning about hate. Someone in this town hated him enough to go over the edge into insanity, and all your soft ways can't help that."

"They might help him tomorrow," said Sylvia levelly. "What I want for Rodney Barratt is his happiness, and that's more than either of you can truthfully say."

"We define it differently!" Polly flashed back at her. "And as for my leaving him there alone, I came back to find out *why* he's alone." She looked at Sade. "You said you called the mines and gave the message. Did you actually put in a call?"

"I did. I called 'em the minute you drove away. The man did sound kind of funny—like he was drunk or something—but I told him, and don't you dare say I didn't! And then I got to thinkin', and after I'd tried to get some other people, I called again, but couldn't get through."

"That much could be true," said Polly thoughtfully. "I checked on it when we came back here. But for the rest—"

"Please," Sylvia said. "How can it help Rodney if you stay here making accusations? He must be in torment. Haven't you done anything sensible? Have you tried to find Violet Prager?"

"You might help *there*," said Polly, the cutting edge still in her voice. "Sade was supposed to try finding her, and had no luck—if you made those calls, Sade. But

you, Mrs. Stevenson, might really know where to find her; you are friends."

Sylvia's palm came down hard on a tabletop. "And what of it? If a few more decent people had tried to be her friends, she might not—oh, never mind that. I don't know where she is. I do know that if she had any part in this terrible business it was only because she didn't know what she was doing. But you must not speak as if I had a hand in it too, Miss Neale. You must not."

"Don't tell me what I mustn't do! Can't you see I'm trying to find Marjorie Barratt before she dies?"

For a moment there was silence. The three women stood motionless, Sade Kushin's eyes sullenly downcast, Sylvia's gradually widening on Polly. It broke with an indrawn breath like a shriek. "You mean she's not dead?" Sylvia cried out.

"You didn't know that? Of course she may be alive—for an hour or two more. We're trying desperately to find her, or find who the madman is—something, anything." She turned to Sade again. "I thought it might be you. I know Rod's in torment, and you're the one who'd love to see it. Now, I'm not so sure. But if you haven't hidden Marjorie, and if you really did put through those calls—"

"I did. I swear I did. You think I'm not workin', too? You think I'm not half sick, worryin' about—" Sade turned suddenly, flinging her hands up to her face, stumbling a few steps toward the corner of the room. She spoke over her shoulder, after a moment. "You talk as if I'd been just settin' here! After Doctor Rod phoned up, I tried again, callin' all over town—and I got Myrtle Young at the Whittleby place, and she says old Doc just come in, he'd been to the cemetery and was all excited, pear in a frenzy, jabberin' about it.

And I offered my help and went over there, just to see what I could get out of him. You know he's always hated Doctor Rod—and he's just the man to think nothing of a precious baby's life. It might of been him, just as easy as not. But I couldn't find out a thing! I was there near an hour—trying not to let them know—"

"So that's where you were." Polly jammed her hands into her raincoat pockets. "So maybe you haven't had a hand in this after all. Then do you see what that means? Well, Mrs. Stevenson," she tossed the words over her shoulder, and Sade turned about slowly, "there's a job for you. You've got time to go round to the bars and see if Violet's in—"

"She ain't here," said Mrs. Kushins in a stupefied voice.

Polly flashed around. She had been talking to an empty space. The door to the hall was closed, but through it came the murmur of a voice. "Tell the chief when he comes in that Dr. Bariatt needs him at the cemetery."

Polly Neale jerked the door open and fairly flung herself down the hall. She had the receiver out of Sylvia's hand and was calling into the receiver: "No, it's a mistake!" while the heavy voice of Joe Merkle was still answering the last remark. "You want him at the cemetery? Y'know, that's funny— Hi, Chief! Here he is now, just come in."

"It's a mistake, Chief Tyloe," Polly cried desperately. He couldn't be listening to her, for she heard, in the background, Joe Merkle rumbling out the essentials of the story. Sylvia Stevenson had doubtless told him the whole thing; she turned a blazing look into the gray eyes. Tyloe wasn't listening— "No, don't come, someone's trying to play a joke—"

Jim Tyloe's voice cut in on hers. "Who's that talking? Miss Neale this time? Well, now, I don't think this is no joke. Some funny things been goin' on up to that cemetery tonight. I'll be right over."

Polly slammed down the receiver. "You did that! I hope you're satisfied now that you've taken away Rod's last hope! Oh, God—I've got to get out there and warn him—"

She ran down the hall and out into the night. The moist wind had sharpened. She slipped under the wheel, shivering, and managed only after the second try to slam the door against the onslaught of wind. She turned the key, stepped on the starter. It ground futilely and refused to spark the engine. She switched it off, then on, and tried again.

She was still trying when she heard a siren. She stamped on the starter with renewed vigor, but to no avail. The chief's car swung into the drive and stopped alongside. Jim Tyloe was driving, with Joe Merkle beside him in the front seat.

Polly stepped hard. The starter caught on. She ~~threw~~ in the clutch and swung the wheel sharply in an attempt to circle the chief's car, but he was too quick for her. He yanked open her door and pulled her out. She tried to break away, sobbing.

"Going to warn the doc, huh? Thought you'd get a head start?"

She fought him with a strength she hadn't known she possessed, but one great bearlike arm held her fast. The other brushed automatically over her body. "Some hell-cat, ain't you? Don't want you pullin' a gun on me. Nothin' but keys, I guess.—Here, here, what you doin' with a keycase that's got Ed Quigley's name on it? Where'd you get that?"

Polly set her lips.

"Okay, we'll find' out. Get in the back seat with her, Joe."

The front door opened. Sylvia came down the porch steps. "I'm coming too," she told him steadily.

"Okay, Mrs. Stevenson Hop in." Jim Tyloe managed to get behind Polly and propel her by the elbows into his car. "Now move over, so you're between Joe and Mrs. Stevenson."

Polly turned her head. "Satisfied? Satisfied?" she said in a hissing whisper. Sylvia's eyes glinted toward hers in the half light, and Sylvia answered: "You don't know what you're talking about. It's too late to handle this alone—and I'll manage Jim Tyloe."

"You think you can handle anyone, don't you? The Stevenson money, the Stevenson name—-I'm sick of hearing about 'em."

Sylvia's head turned away, and the darkness screened her face as the chief's car swung into the drive.

"So, Miss Polly Neale, you're in on this?" said Tyloe heavily. "Suppose you tell me what it's all about?"

She said coldly: "I'm sure Mrs. Stevenson told you. Brought you here fast enough."

"He shrugged. "Okay. I'll talk direct to the doc at the cemetery."

Siren wailing, he picked up speed. Quigley's Furniture Emporium showed brightly ahead, its neon sign a perpetual nighttime landmark.

Without a word Jim Tyloe left the car and let himself into the place with the keys he had taken from Polly. Polly stirred uneasily between her guards.

A car drove alongside and someone called: "You there, Chief?" A keen dark-eyed face appeared at the window. It was Tim Bittman, editor of the town's

paper. There was another man beside him: old Prager, Violet's father.

Joe Merkle said: "Chief's inside. We just picked up these here ladies, and we're goin' out to the cemetery for Doc Barratt."

"I just got his message myself. What gives?" Bittman's black eyes, alive with interest, darted from Merkle to the two women.

Polly's muscles tensed. She glanced at Merkle, who was leaning out the window to begin the story. She looked at Sylvia Stevenson; and Sylvia's hand was on the door catch, pressing it, releasing it; her feet had been drawn aside. "If you think it'll help—" Sylvia whispered.

The door swung open and Polly flung herself out, stumbling once and then regaining balance and running to Bittman's car. "Start!" she yelled at him, getting in. "Out to the cemetery—get the real story, quick!"

Joe Merkle shouted: "Stop!" and made a futile grab for his own door handle; but Bittman's car had begun to move, and the editor was saying: "You're on."

Through the rear window appeared a rapidly diminishing scene: Merkle and Tyloe and Ed Quigley, standing on the sidewalk, Merkle with an arm pointed down the road, Quigley waving both fists above his head and gesturing wildly at his own Emporium. Tyloe stood quite still. His head was hunched between his shoulders in a queer rigidity that somehow gave the effect of dismay.

### XIII • 11.45 P.M. to 12.50 A.M.

RODNEY BARRATT stood alone in the cave of light that his lantern carved out of the darkness. Through a stupor of fatigue and indecision he heard the sound of his own car engine, a few hundred yards away; he could just discern the flash of the headlights as Polly backed and turned. Then the hoarse purr of the engine grew fainter. She was gone, and he thought vaguely that sound didn't carry well through these trees, over these hillocks. Anyone who knew the road well, and drove with parking lights only, could coast down that last hill to the gates and arrive unnoticed.

Perhaps that was how the watcher of the earlier hours had come and gone. There had been no time then to search the encircling roads and thickets for a car; or he had thought there was not. He had not even been sure that there was a watcher. Maybe it would have been better to search—maybe he should try it now—

No. His car was gone. It would take an hour to do it on foot. There was no time—or time stretched illimitably before him, he could not think which.

Far back in his mind that closed door shuddered as if something were straining against it to be let out. He would have to start moving once more; but he felt as he might during a long operation, when the fumes of ether had got to him—a little nauseated, and attacked by a deadly, creeping lethargy that had to be fought back with a physical effort.

If he stood still, and thought? If he searched the indications as he might look through a case history again and again for the root of a patient's unaccountable malaise? This was a sick mind, beyond doubt, and the sickness was deep, deep within. It could not be expressed in a symptom as straightforward as murder. It tortured, and used a helpless victim as the instrument.

Since it was as devious as that, one might look for further twists in its working. What had the voice said? "She's not lost, you know. She may be found—but perhaps not soon enough." That was to give the penultimate torment of hope; and then the ultimate, the death of hope. He, Barratt, was meant to find the thing he sought, but to find it too late. These graves, disturbed in such cunning sequence so that each one would seem a likely hiding-place—surely there was a symptom there? Was he to provide the most exquisite amusement for the torturer by passing close to what he sought, and failing to see it because of misdirection?

But no, unless there really had been a watcher, there could have been no advantage in that. There was nothing left now but to search again, and fail again and again if it were meant to be that way. Barratt started off, aimlessly at first, then quickening his step as he remembered a choked-off sentence that old Hummel had spoken: "I saw them by the m—" Was it possible he'd meant the Morrison grave, where a small boy had been buried seven years ago, just after Barratt had begun his practice? It had been the first case he had lost, but the parents never blamed him—or had they? . . .

The Morrison grave was near the old part of the cemetery, and he could see at a glance that it was un-

disturbed. No indication there; and of course the grave of Ulysses Smith had had nothing to do with the matter, it had been only in their haste and panic that they had thought—

He swept the beam of his flashlight—not so bright now as when they had begun—across the tumbled earth that had been tossed from the Smith grave. The fog was breaking, and now and again there was a faint shine of moonlight that caught a glimmer from the white headstones. Then a gust of wind would send the last remnants of mist twirling away among trees, like something alive that stirred in the crouching darkness. The moon came through clearly for a minute, to aid the failing flashlight, and Barratt glimpsed something that brought him stooping over the grave of Ulysses Smith.

It was a footprint in the wet earth. He held his own foot above the outline, its edges only a little blurred by fallen rain. His shoe was longer and broader. Polly had been wearing Cuban-heeled goloshes: she had not made the imprint.

Then there had been somebody watching and gloating, following them. He had not imagined it. And in that case—his failures had indeed provided the cream of the jest. Somewhere—somewhere he had taken the wrong turn, and had insured his own defeat. Perhaps he had been meant to dig within a few inches of the thing he sought. . . .

He stood panting, aimlessly glancing about him. Something—there was something that had been almost within his grasp; he had thought of indirection, of concealment; he had remembered, too, that choked-off sentence in old Hummel's voice: "By the m- -"

There was the mausoleum. He had looked at it once

before, and had noticed the unmarked pathway, but there had been hard rain since five o'clock—the rain had kept on after he and Polly had begun their search—and it had wiped out their prints on Ulysses's grave so that only the later print showed *The mausoleum*—He began to run.

Bartatt pushed through a group of privets, brushing their fine branches aside. A spider's web struck across one eye. He rubbed at it until it ran water. His vision cleared enough for him to push on. His heart was pounding madly, no way to control these constant surges of hope.

The name was carved so large and deep in the stone arch above the elaborate gilded door that he could make it out even in the fast dimming torchlight. The mist was thick again now. The white stone seemed to blend with it. The marble angel loomed out of the mist as though its wings in fact supported it, hovering over him, simpering at his quest.

He flung himself at the door, and the spray of wistaria that seemingly had grown across it came loose with a twitch and hung swaying. The door was sturdily padlocked. He circled the vault, looking for a window that might be forced, he couldn't remember if mausoleums had windows. Something caught at his heel, tripped him. He fell face forward in the matted dead grass. Dazedly he reached back to remove the material caught on his shoe.

The flashlight was almost dead. He held it close.

The cloth was dirty and trampled, but its shape was discernible. It had been pink. It was the hood of a small snowsuit.

He got to his feet and once more plunged at the door.

of the Tyloe mausoleum. The padlock held; dimly he remembered a key, seen somewhere, in someone's house, this evening; but there was no time to go anywhere looking for a key, and the light was all but dead. He had to utilize these few seconds before it went out. *There was no time.*

**NANCY TYLOE  
QUIGLEY**

Dearly Beloved Wife  
of Edward Quigley

Adored Sister  
of James Tyloe

"Sleep gently, dear"

**EDWARD  
QUIGLEY, JR.**

Infant Son of  
Edward

and

Nancy Quigley

*HUSH, baby, hush. You are safer here than if we both  
had lived. . . .*

We have escaped you, Ed, forever

Dimly, now, I can remember the searing pains of childbirth, the feeling of terror and aloneness, the impulse, almost unendurable, to call Dr. Barratt to my aid, to feel his strength and knowledge protecting me, helping me. . . . And then, with my arm outstretched toward the telephone on my bedside table, the other impulse, stronger, to protect the moving child within me from life, by death. I remembered the doctor's words, when I went to him only a month before: "Nancy, there's a little trouble here, but nothing to be alarmed about. The afterbirth's been ruptured, so I'll want to do a Cæsarian section, to be on the safe side; but I want to operate when your time is due, without

waiting for labor." He wrote something on a memorandum, then glanced up at me and smiled, as if to reassure me. "Be sure to let me know if the pains start prematurely, won't you? And in the meantime, don't worry. Promise?"

But already a thought, a hope, an answer to all that life had denied me, was rushing through my mind: escape. Escape for me and for my child. I did not meet the doctor's eyes; I murmured, only: "I understand, doctor."

And I did understand—that there was escape, now, for me and for my child.

In the last month of my life I lost two persons whom I loved—one by death, one by disillusion.

Mine had been a placid enough childhood. I loved my family; I made no friends outside it. I was plain and shy, and other children tried to use me as the butt in their games because I let myself be put upon, but my brother Jim came to my defense always. I worshipped him for it, all through my childhood and girlhood, for his bull like strength and the way he swaggered to my rescue. When a neighbor's child pulled one of my pigtails, Jim twisted the child's arm until he screamed with pain; and when the punier and more defenseless ones treated me with the special cruelty that children reserve for someone even weaker than themselves, they received the worst of his punishment.

At the time it seemed only right to me, even glorious. I learned later that there are adults with strange perverted souls, at war with the ways of civilization; but most children are like that by nature. If Jim, my champion and hero, enjoyed giving pain to others, it was only because he loved me and would go

to any lengths to protect me. He boasted that he never forgave an injury, but it seemed that most of his revenges were taken for my sake.

After a time the other children let me alone, and since there was peace in my solitary state, I didn't mind. I grew up in the shelter of one of the foremost families of Red Forks; my innocence was protected from the evils about me, and my mind protected from knowledge by a big brother who would not permit me to go away to college—because, he said, life would be too lonely for him without me. I was young, and his devotion meant the whole world to me, then. I never asked again.

I stayed home and kept house for Jim. And fell in love with Alan. What is it that makes love? Why should I have seen Alan leading a band, playing a trumpet, a tall, slender, frail-looking youth with a lock of blond hair falling over his forehead, and know that the soft wings of love had touched me? Jim had taken me to a dance at the Grange hall and I was dancing with Ed Quigley, who Jim seemed to think was the only man I'd be safe with on a dance floor, and as we went past the bandstand I glanced up and caught the band-leader's eye and he caught mine and missed a note and smiled, and went on playing.

He managed an introduction to me afterwards, while I was having a glass of punch, and then Jim came up and pulled me roughly away. He hustled me outside and into the car before he spoke another word, and then he said, under his breath but not too far under for me to hear: "You damned little tramp. Picking up with a trumpet player, for God's sake." I shrank back in my seat, appalled; for never had Jim spoken to me like that before. I thought he must be drunk, but there was no liquor on his breath. "Don't ever let me catch you with

that rat again," he said, "or I'll break every bone in his body. Damned, cheap traveling musician."

I began to cry, sobbing out: "Jim, I don't know you when you talk that way!"

"Yes, you do," he said, with an odd, sly look at me. "I have to guard you, Nancy. You're too precious to be thrown away."

"But—don't be angry at *him*, dear. He's—he's nice. You'll realize that when you know him."

"I'm not going to," Jim said, "because we'll see no more of him."

But I saw Alan, inevitably. And surreptitiously. And fell headlong in love with him. He was sweet, he was gentle, there was nothing cheap or tawdry about him; and he loved music beyond anything else on earth. Except me.

I knew instinctively, without analyzing my reasons, that our marriage must be secret; for although it had occurred to me that Jim might have changed his opinion of Alan once he realized that he was not trying to seduce me, I was still afraid, somewhere deep inside me, that he would somehow mar my love.

He did, of course. I was to meet Alan after dusk had fallen, at the outskirts of Red Forks, and we were going to drive until we found a minister who would marry us, and then we were going to keep on driving until we were far from Red Forks and all the unhappiness that it had ever held for me.

Alan did not come, I waited for three hours. I never saw him again, although it was many years before I knew why.

I was bewildered, but at first I didn't feel the deepest hurt. All I knew was that something had happened to keep Alan from meeting me. After a few days,

it appeared that somehow Jim had known of our plans—and then he began, little by little, gently to explain the truth; that Alan had never meant to marry me, that he meant to seduce me, and that when he knew Jim was aware of this fact, he had sneaked away like a spineless creature.

A year went by, another, while I dutifully kept house for Jim, while I smiled at his little pleasantries, shuddered uneasily at his bullying of any youth who dared to show me attention, and lived within the deep recesses of my own mind. If I hadn't been living in this half world of mine I would never have married Ed Quigley.

He was a man I had known most of my life, and yet knew not at all. Next to our own family, his was the most important one in Red Forks, and there was always a certain amount of competition between the two as to whose house had the most cupolas, whose home had the most employees, whose womenfolk had the most dresses; a futile, senseless competition but one that is all too common in small towns where there is little else of interest and where all horizons are too limited.

At first the Tyloes were the important family, with the Quigleys skittering madly to keep up with them; and then when Jim's and my father died and Jim took over the management of the cement works that had kept us prosperous through the years, everything seemed to go wrong. It was chiefly employee trouble; many of the old ones left, unable to endure Jim's overbearing ways, and the new ones struck it out only for the money they could get and not because of any loyalty to the firm or to Jim. When finally there was a strike among the locally organized workers, Jim in a rage told them that he would close the plant down rather

than give in to their demands but, unbelieving, 'they kept on with their strike and the plant was closed. For good. It caused a minor depression in Red Forks, with so much buying power gone, but to Jim this was just verification of his own righteousness and, triumphantly, he turned to politics as his next step up the ladder in his battle for superiority over the Quigleys. He got as far as Chief of Police, and that's where he stayed. But it seemed to satisfy him for as I learned later it gave him unqualified power over the poor wretches who were thrown in jail for drunkenness, minor thefts, and vagrancy.

There was a minor scandal shortly after Jim took office, because a man who had been seen in a rest room giving himself an injection was rushed off to jail as a drug addict where he died in a diabetic coma, but this soon blew over when Jim explained that one of his underlings was responsible. The whole scandal might never have come to light at all if Dr. Barratt hadn't found out about it. Jim had sent his new deputy, the only one around at the time to get old Doc Whittleby to sign the death certificate, but when he found Whittleby out on a call he got Dr. Barratt instead. By the time Dr. Barratt had discovered that the dead man was a diabetic instead of a drug addict, Jim had managed to extract a confession (by means of a rubber hose) from the deputy, who was then sent on his way with orders never to stick his nose in Red Forks again.

The only reason there wasn't a worse scandal was that Dr. Barratt simply couldn't disprove the false confession without a witness, so the matter was dropped. But Dr. Barratt had made an enemy, and Jim never, never let a grudge go unsettled.

I learned about these things gradually " and gradually

came to realize they could be true; but I thought that Jim was cruel only to those who somehow deserved it. While I was still his cherished little sister I believed in him and trusted him. I doubted the one man I should have trusted—Alan—and put my welfare and my life in the hands of the two men I should have doubted above all others: my brother and my husband.

. . . In the beginning I had nothing in particular against Ed Quigley. On the surface there had always been a friendship of sorts between him and Jim, although underneath there was the bitter competition between them for the supremacy of their families, one over the other; it was as though by being "friends" each could to better advantage keep an eye on the other's progress. During the years when I was young, Ed's family, as a result of owning the only furniture store in town, was more prosperous than Jim's and mine; but on the other hand it was conceded by the villagers that the Tyloes had more background and breeding, so it was pretty much of a standoff as to which one was really ahead in the senseless effort to be the first family of Red Forks. Ed was away at school a good deal, so I didn't see much of him in my teens, and when he came back to Red Forks for good, I can remember how appalled I was at the idea of his having set up an undertaking establishment. (Instead of being at college, as I had thought, he was actually studying embalming!)

"But Jim," I demanded, "why doesn't he just go into the family furniture store instead of into the—" I shuddered—"the undertaking business?"

Jim shrugged. "People can get along without furniture," he said, "but not without funerals. Believe me, there's money in it."

"I should think he'd hate it," I murmured; but after

a while I became used to it and even admired, in a way, the sad and sympathetic mien Ed put on at the few funerals I had reason to attend. I remember thinking that he probably hated it, but after all, every town had to have an undertaking establishment. It never occurred to me, not for many years, that as a matter of fact the only reason he did go into it was because he liked it; for Red Forks was so small that a funeral parlor could not have supported anyone, despite Jim's assertion to the contrary—there simply were not enough deaths—and that it was not only his hobby but his passion and joy; whereas the furniture business was his livelihood.

I was young, I had been sheltered, and I was still lost in the world of my own broken heart, or I surely would have known what was happening to me. I should have seen Jim for what he was and Ed for what he was; I should have demanded my share of what was left of the family money and left Red Forks forever, even if only to get a job in another town. But I still trusted Jim, and when I finally realized how he had maneuvered me into marriage with Ed it was too late for me to assert myself. Ed was all kindness, devotion, consideration, as anxious to consolidate himself with the Tyloes as Jim was to consolidate himself with the Quigleys. With both money and social position, and with Jim the police chief and Ed the coroner, they had the town in the palm of their hands. With me as the helpless go between.

I was still dreaming of myself as Alan's wife when I found that, instead, I was Ed's wife. Slowly, day by day, I began to wake up, to shake off the mists that surrounded me, to realize, with bewilderment and terror, what had happened to me.

If I had had more of a life of my own, when I was young, I might have known how to assert myself, but I had always been under the domination of my brother, so that when finally I came under the domination of my husband I was completely helpless. It was as though Ed dominated me just to show that he could, not for any special purpose or reason. For example, he told me once that he would bring home the groceries that night and that I was not to go out.

But when I was working in the yard that afternoon, Sylvia Stevenson stopped on her way home and said: "What a lovely garden you have, Mrs. Quigley."

I smiled up at her, from my knees, and she went on in her soft, kind voice: "But you look so hot and tired. Come on home with me and we'll have a glass of ice-cold lemonade. How does that sound?"

"Wonderful!" I said, laughing. "Wait just a minute until I get cleaned up a bit."

I'd never known Sylvia very well, before; I knew that some of the people in Red Forks thought she was too high-and-mighty for their tastes; but that afternoon she was lovely to me, and for no reason except that she wanted to be kind. We had several glasses of lemonade that had been sweetened and colored with grenadine, and she told me she had never got over her love for pink lemonade because it always made her think of her childhood. "Strange," she mused, telling me about it, "how we always go back to memories of our childhoods when adulthood becomes too much for us. Children have problems, too, but I think we always forget them when we remember back to our own childhoods —" She bit her lip, as if she had said too much, and started talking of other things. But her house was so beautifully dim and cool, her voice so soothing and

gentle, that I didn't realize how time had gone by until I heard the grandfather clock booming five.

"Oh, heavens!" I said, jumping up. "I had no idea it was so late."

She drove me back, and I seemed to be pushing the car all the way, praying I would get home before Ed did. But I didn't, of course. Often he would sneak home from work early, just to see what I was doing.

As I came in the door, he jumped up from the chair where he'd been brooding, and came toward me, his eyes malevolent. "I thought I told you not to go out this afternoon," he said.

"But Ed, I was only visiting Sylvia Stevenson—"

"That slut," he said between his teeth. "I'll teach you to do what I tell you!" He took me by the arm so tightly there were marks on it for days and dragged me to my room. He threw me on the bed and stood over me, his face distorted, not so much with rage as with frustration because I had disobeyed him. "Don't ever go to that woman's house again," he said with deadly calm. "And when I tell you to stay home, you stay home!" He slammed the bedroom door as he went out and I could hear the key turning in the lock. He left me there, without food or water, until the next morning when he came and unlocked the door.

"Well," he said, smirking. "Think you've learned your lesson?"

He was completely unpredictable, for at other times he would be pleasant and act almost like a normal husband. Like his acceptance of my friendship with little Donna Parks. I had known her from the time she was five, when she first came with her mother to live with Gramp Hummel, because she played with Jim's and my little cousin Jean, and I had always thought

what a sweet and pretty youngster she was. Her mother had had a hard life and sometimes, while I was still keeping house for Jim, she would bring the child over and we'd sit and talk, while Donna played outside. Then, when the mother died and Donna was left to the care of her grandfather, I tried to do little things to help out; but he had a fierce sort of pride and while he was always polite I could see that he didn't want to be in the position of accepting anything from outsiders. Poor little Donna looked so forlorn; a pretty girl in her teens, dressed as an old man thought she should dress, living the kind of life an old man thought she should live. Once she said desperately to me: "Mrs. Quigley, can't you make Gramp understand that girls have to have a little fun *once* in a while?" And then she added, bitterly for one so young: "But even if I did go out, I wouldn't have anything decent to wear. Gramp insists on choosing all my clothes himself."

"Donna," I said hesitantly, "I—I have a few things that don't fit me very well and I'd love for you to have them—" Strangely enough, although Ed would let me run up any amount I wanted to spend in the local department store, he'd never give me any change that wasn't accounted for; so I thought I'd get a few things at the store for Donna even though at that time her grandfather seemed to be comfortably enough off, and charge them to Ed without letting him know. But Donna said, her eyes filling with tears: "Oh, Mrs. Quigley, that's so good of you but Gramp would never let me accept anything—" The tears spilled over and she ran out of the house before I could say another word.

Ed came in, in a pleasant mood for once, and said, "What's the matter with the kid?" I told him and

he said: "Well, heck, if the old man won't take any of your cast-off clothes, why don't you suggest that you pick out some for her and let him pay for them? He's got plenty of dough but the old skinflint won't spend it, if he can help it. Appeal to his pride—that'll fetch him all right." That's why Ed seemed so unpredictable: it was the first time since I'd known him that he had ever considered another person's feelings.

At any rate, when I approached Gramp on the subject of Donna's clothes he said stiffly: "You know better what she should wear than an old man does, Mrs. Quigley; you will choose her clothes and I will pay for them."

Since Ed had told me Gramp had plenty of money salted away I did not stint myself where Donna was concerned; but it was only a short time later that I learned mortgages had been foreclosed on both his bakery and his cottage, and I knew then why Ed had encouraged me to see that Gramp spent plenty for Donna's clothes. For he had held both mortgages, and although the comparatively small amount spent on Donna could not have made much difference, I suppose Ed felt that every penny spent drew the old man closer to the edge of insolvency.

Ed's persecution of me continued. One day he said slyly: "I saw you talking to Doc Barratt in the post office this afternoon." No particular answer seemed called for and when I said nothing he commented mildly: "Got something the matter with you?"

"No," I said. "I just happened to meet him."

"Just happened?" he said, raising his eyebrows. "Sure you didn't have a date with him? I hear the doc has quite a way with the ladies."

"Don't be ridiculous," I said in a sharper voice than I had ever used with him.

His face mottled and his eyes seemed to grow smaller, as they always did when he was enraged. He got slowly to his feet "What did you call me?" he said in a murderous voice.

"Why, I—I didn't call you anything," I faltered.

"You said I was ridiculous, didn't you? Ridiculous! *Don't you ever, as long as you live say a thing like that to me again!*"

"But Ed—"

He came up close to me now, his eyes on a level with mine, for he was a short man. He stared at me hard, and I was frightened at the look on his face "And don't let me ever catch you talking to a man again. Do you hear? *Any man!*"

I was afraid of him. Terribly afraid, although I hardly knew why, myself. But I felt that there were terrible depths in him that I could never penetrate, nor want to, that there was something horrifying about him, the same thing that used to take him down to his "mortuary" night after night and that later, often early in the morning, would bring him to my room to wake me up so that I could listen to his talk. He was like a husband who has affairs with other women and can't resist the temptation of talking about them to his wife.

"Had a fine case today," he'd say, sitting on the edge of my bed (we had long ceased to share a bedroom, and I often wondered why he had married me in the first place), "that Ames kid that got run over. Boy, was she a little beauty, eight years old, side of her head all mashed in—"

I would lie there, my stomach heaving, trying to etch an interested smile on my lips, for he watched me every moment during these recitals.

"—but I patched her up real good so it hardly shows, and laid her out nice as could be. Put just a tiny bit of color in her cheeks, the way kids have—of course you can't paint 'em up the way you can women—and brushed out that yellow hair of hers. Looked better'n she did when she was livin'."

And I would remember the little Ames girl, laughing and sturdy, the yellow curls bouncing as she ran, and close my eyes to hold back the tears; for I was supposed to commend him for his aptitude in the chosen work that was the love of his life, and not to feel that his Galatea would be better off if she were still among the quick. I had cried once before when he described in detail the work he had done on a former schoolmate of mine, and he had put both of his white, well-cared-for hands about my throat and held them there, loosely, like a noose that could be instantly tightened, while he smiled into my eyes. "You'd make an awfully pretty corpse," he whispered.

Once I tried to tell Jim what I was enduring, the terror that lived with me by day, that slept with me at night, the more terrifying because I did not know from what it stemmed. I told Jim that I didn't want to be married to Ed any longer, that I wanted to come home where I'd be safe. Jim said: "Honey, take it easy. Ed's been telling me about these terrible headaches of yours and—"

"Headaches?" I echoed. "But I don't have headaches."

Jim patted my shoulder indulgently. "You got to stop thinking everybody's out to get you," he said. "Ed's told

me all about it—the headaches and nightmares and the way you imagine things all the time. Says he's half out of his mind for fear you'll go out of yours." He laughed at his own macabre joke. "I told him maybe you was 'that way' "—with a sly wink—"but Ed said hell, no, you wouldn't even sleep with him any more."

I had no headaches. I had no nightmares—none while I was sleeping, anyway. And it was Ed who refused to share the same room with me any longer, to my infinite relief, although it was just beginning to dawn on me that this was to cover up his own inadequacy as a man. Yet he had let Jim believe that *I* was the one who had made the decision. . . .

A chill went through me, fear more frightening than any I had ever known before, because now I knew I was alone. Ed had been clever, had been sly; he had gotten to Jim before I could, he had put me on the defensive, he had made all my complaints against him appear to be the manifestations of a persecution complex. And Jim believed him. Jim believed him because he wanted to, and because he was completely devoid of all imagination. But why, I thought wildly—why, why? What was Ed trying to do? Why was he trying to keep me in his power like this?

It took me a long time to realize how simple the answer was: Ed simply wanted power. He was a man small in stature and small in soul, and to compensate he simply had to have someone who was weaker than he was. He married me in order to consolidate the two families; he kept me married to him because he could force me to do his bidding, regardless of how senseless or futile his bidding might be.

Comprehending this, it did not take me long to realize that the reason he loved his undertaking busi-

ness was because all of the bodies that came to him were completely in his power. They were his to do with as he wished. They could not talk back. They could not object to the way he laid them out. It was he who decided, for the final time in their lives, what they should look like. He must have supremacy. And if he lost me, that would be another, added stigma to his whole life of inadequacy—a man who had money and family, who was not bad looking, who had a fair education—and yet a man who couldn't even hold his wife.

I began to build about myself a wall that Ed could not penetrate, and the more I withdrew behind it, the more enraged he became. He would wake me up in the middle of the night, after he had returned from his macabre rendezvous at the funeral parlor, and describe in detail just what he had done with the most recent body—how lifelike it was and what a horrible looking sight it had been when he first started to work on it—and I would lie there looking at him, never flinching, inserting a polite word occasionally as though we had just met at a tea and I was trying to make conversation. No longer could he penetrate the wall, no longer could he touch the real me; and as he saw me withdrawing from his power his rage grew deadly, and I could see other plans beginning to form in his mind.

One evening after dinner he said pleasantly: "Well, I must go down to the mortuary and do some work on old man Bronson." Old man Bronson had been the town drunk and only that afternoon had been found dead in the cemetery, a half-empty bottle of rum clutched in a stiffening arm. "Would you care to come along with me, my dear?" I didn't even shudder.

"No, thank you," I said politely.

"Oh, come along," he urged pleasantly. "A little fresh air will do you good."

"No, thank you," I said, still politely.

His pleasantness began to wear thin. "I want someone to talk to while I work," he said. "You've never really seen me laying out anyone, have you?" His small eyes watched me avidly, waiting for the expected flinching. I rose and started clearing off the table, and he suddenly reached out and grasped my arm. "Damn you," he said between his teeth. "You're coming with me, do you hear?"

"No," I said.

"You're coming with me," and now his voice was deadly, "if I have to carry you!"

"Then carry me," I said; and walked out to the kitchen.

As I came back I could see him looking at me, completely baffled. Never before had I openly defied him; never before had I been so completely impervious to anything he said or did. But the wall about me was thick and tight, now; he could not penetrate it. Suddenly, as he watched me, I could see his eyes change, as if something new, something besides forcing me to accompany him to watch the work he loved so much, had begun to seep into his mind. His face relaxed, became composed, and I could see a small satisfied smile begin to play about his mouth.

"Very well, my dear," he said softly. "Have it your own way."

That night he moved back into my bedroom.

. . . In the next few weeks I tried to build the wall about me higher and stronger and tighter, so that even the relationship I abhorred could not penetrate it; but my complete emotional withdrawal into a world of my

own did not seem to thwart my husband. So then I knew that he was after something besides the complete crushing of my spirit.

It was three months later before I knew what it was.

One night he said to me: "You've been seeing Dr. Barratt lately, haven't you?"

"Yes. We've been having a clandestine love affair," I said bitterly, and he laughed.

"Oh, po, my dear. I questioned him today and found out what's the matter with you."

My heart almost stopped. I had thought surely, surely I would have found some way to escape him before he discovered that I was pregnant. The wall I had built so painstakingly had shattered about me when I found I was to have a child, and all the hard, bitter coldness about my heart was breaking up. I thought: "A child of my own. *A child that must never know its father!*" I had already started keeping money out of Ed's niggardly household allowance; twice I had got up quietly in the middle of the night and taken money from his pockets. I had surveyed carefully everything in the house, wondering what I could sell that Ed wouldn't miss, for I knew it would be no use going to Jim; Ed's insinuations had done their deadly work too well.

It had never occurred to me that Ed was keeping such a close watch that he had discovered my visits to Dr. Barratt, any more than it occurred to me to warn the doctor not to mention my condition to Ed. I simply felt that it was my own affair and that there was no way for Ed to discover it before I found a chance to escape him.

He was watching me closely, a look of satisfaction on his face. "You're not so smart," he said now, with a

hateful little chuckle. "No use trying to get the best of me, my dear. Well, well, it'll be nice to hear little footsteps around this place, won't it? A boy, I trust. Someone to take over my mortuary business when I'm too old. Someone who'll take as much interest in it as I do. A nice little kid," he added softly, "who'll take orders from me a lot better than his mother does. Someone little, who can be *made* to mine."

Sometimes I felt that the devil inhabited Ed Quigley; it was almost as though he could read my mind.

He came home early from the furniture store one afternoon—he worked at the mortuary only at night—and found me packing frantically, for I knew that never would I bear a child who was to come under his domination. Anything—anything—I told myself, the wall by now completely shattered by the small moving life within me—anything would be better than to subject my child to what it would have to endure from Ed. I would go to the ends of the earth, Ed should never find me. . . .

And so Ed walked in. For a moment he must have forgotten that I was the repository of his newest victim, for he took me by the shoulder and threw me across the room, and for a sudden blinding moment I hoped he had killed me. It was then, I knew, that the after-birth had been ruptured, for it was on my next visit that Dr. Barratt told me I must have a Caesarian. But I knew in that moment that never, while I lived, could I escape Ed Quigley.

My time was still a month 't when the letter came from Alan. Never, in all those years, had I known why he hadn't come that night; but the letter told me. And

with that revelation I knew my brother for what he was: someone who didn't love me at all and never had—who loved only cruelty.

Jim and one of his henchmen had beaten Alan almost to death. They had crushed his right hand until he would never again be able to play the trumpet or any other musical instrument. Jim had leaned over, at the end, and whispered to the half-conscious man, whose only crime had been that he had dared to take one of Jim Tyloe's possessions: "If you ever see Nancy again I'll kill her with my own hands; I'll kill her slowly, the way I almost killed you."

Alan had dragged himself away, and left town in an agony of terror for me that was worse than his own pain. He had written me letter after letter, and then had not dared to send them for fear they would fall into Jim's hands and that Jim would carry out his threat to kill me. But he felt that he could not go—"go" where, I wondered confusedly as I read—without letting me know that he had not deceived me. He had tried, he said, to forget both me, for my sake, and his music, for his, but without either of us life held nothing more. He was impoverished, because he knew nothing but music and his crippled hand was a constant defeat; and his heart was empty, for each woman he met made him remember me. Even though he should come to me, he said, and take me from Jim forever, he had nothing to offer—no home, no security, no future. So he was leaving the life that Jim had made impossible for him to cherish any longer, and he wanted me to know that, wherever he found himself afterwards, he would love me always.

For the first time in many months I could feel the warm tears pouring into my eyes and down my cheeks,

and I knew then that the wall that I had built so carefully to protect myself from Ed was lying in ruins. First my child, and then Alan, had proved to me that I was not invulnerable; and without invulnerability I could not live.

. . . The pains were hot and searing; they tore through my body like flames, as if I were being burned at the stake. My hand reached out almost involuntarily to the telephone to call Dr. Barratt, but the part of me that was still rational stopped me in time. He must not know. I must die, and my child with me. I must wait until it was too late . . . too late. . . .

All afternoon I suffered and struggled and felt the still-living child moving within me. A red haze danced before my eyes and I bit down on my hand until it bled, to keep from screaming, and I prayed that Ed would come too late to save his newest victim.

He came at last, near dinnertime, and found me writhing on the bed.

"For God's sake," he yelled, "where's the doctor? How long's this been going on?"

No longer could I think clearly. All I wanted was to be out of this, now, forever. I had no strength, no will, no reason left.

"Doctor—couldn't—come!" I gasped.

Ed reached for the phone and I heard him yelling into it, but I knew his worry was not for me but for the child that was already beginning to elude his grasp. "Damn you," I heard him shout. "Where've you been all afternoon? Get out here fast!" He listened for a moment, then slammed down the phone. "If anything happens to that kid," I heard him say between his teeth, "I'll get even with that doctor if it's the last thing I ever do! God damned liar," he muttered. "Said you

didn't call him. As if any woman would lie there, like that and *not* call the doc!"

After awhile, through a red haze, I saw Dr. Barratt. He was leaning over me and saying gently: "Nancy, for God's sake, why didn't you call me?"

"Don't give us that." Jim's voice came roughly, and now I realized that he was standing there beside the doctor, and that his face was white and frightened and angry at the same time. "She did call you, damn you, but you didn't come. Too busy chasing around with that Stevenson woman, I guess. Well, let me tell you this, Doc—"

"Shut up," said Dr. Barratt in a low and venomous voice, "and get after that ambulance. We've got to get her to the operating table as soon as possible."

Jim said, not moving his eyes from the doctor: "Call up the ambulance company, Ed, and tell 'em if they don't get here in five minutes they're out o' business." He knelt beside me. "Nancy, honey," he said, "why didn't you let us know your pains had started, when the doctor wouldn't come?"

But how could I tell him that this was my way of taking leave of a life that I hated and despised, and taking my child with me—taking both of us beyond the reach of Ed Quigley forever?

Jim stood up, and when he spoke his voice was deadly. "You'd better see that nothing happens to her, Doc. Because if you don't pull her through I swear, by God, you're going to pay for it, the way she's paying now."

Ed's voice was just as deadly as Jim's. "That goes for me, too," he said.

"Oh, no!" I cried, as another pain tore at me. "You don't—understand—not Dr. Barratt—he didn't—"

There was a prick in my arm, and mists enfolded me and the pain and the voices and the hating human emotions died away, and peace came to me.

*Hush, baby, hush. You are safer here than if we both had lived.*

## THE MARBLE FOREST

### XIV • 12.50 A.M. to 12.55 A.M.

BARRATT's hands and shoulders ached. Beside him lay his own keys, his pipe tool, his pocket knife, discarded in turn as they proved their uselessness. Neither strength nor ingenuity served against the stubborn sturdiness of the mausoleum padlock.

He stood back from the entrance and relieved his tension by thirty seconds of thoroughgoing profanity. The marble angel, unmoved by such desecration, continued to simmer down on him. He backed off another step, stumbled, swore again, then saw what he had stumbled over.

A three foot length of wrought iron, matching the ornaments of the mausoleum—a scrap discarded in the building, lying there in the grass ever since, as though planted for this moment. Wasn't there a Bible passage about the stone discarded by the builders . . . ?

Barratt went to work with this ornamental, funereal jimmy. As carefully as though he wielded a scalpel on living flesh, he inserted it at the proper pressure point.

Bracing his feet, he strained, gently at first, then with all the strength that remained in him that night. He heard the snap of cracking metal . . . and found himself flat on his back in the grass, staring up into the simpering face of the marble angel.

The jimmy, exposed and rusted, had given way first.

It was almost too much trouble to get up. Both mind and body had reached a point of refusal. If something as picayune as his own life had been at stake, he would have stayed there and met his fate in comfort. But slowly his mind recalled the real pressure that drove him. Frantically it sent messages to his laggard muscles. *Get up . . . get up; . . .*

Then there was the sound of running footsteps and he was at once on his legs, half hidden behind the corner of the mausoleum, one half of the broken jimmy clubbed in his hand.

He stepped forward, lowering the club, as he recognized Polly. "Well?" he demanded.

"She looks afraid of me," he thought. "It can't be the club; she knows me better than that. . . ." But he dropped it anyway.

"I couldn't help it," she was saying. "Honest, Rod. It wasn't my fault. It just happened."

Already he could hear the voices and see the lights. A thundering chorus they seemed in that still cemetery. And the loudest and deepest of them furnished an unmistakable ground bass.

"Tyloel!" he exclaimed. "Polly, you've tricked me! You've trapped me—you've trapped Midge."

"I couldn't help it, I tell you. Sylvia wouldn't listen and—"

But Barratt wasn't listening either. He picked up the

Jimmy again as he went toward the lights without a word.

Sylvia ran to meet him. She said nothing—she was singularly wise in such things—but merely pressed herself against him for an instant. It was enough to remind him that there was in the world life and warmth and softness, that all existence was not confined to death and night and marble.

He faced the group with the spark of a new vigor in him. The spark grew a little more when he realized that Tim Bittman's voice was saying: ". . . damned sorry I was out of town when your housekeeper tried to reach me. I went over to your house as soon as I got back—got there just in time to join the posse."

Somebody laughed. Barratt tried to see the laughter, tried to remember whether he had heard that laugh before on this night.

"Wrong word, wasn't it?" the editor admitted. "But you know what I mean, Barratt. I'm in this with you. Anything I can do—"

Jim Tyloe loomed behind him. "Anything needs doing, I guess the law can take care of it, Bittman." It was funny. Barratt thought, how Tyloe loved to loom over people. Even when you saw him alone. . . . "All right, Doc. I've been hearin' some god damned screwy stories about what's been going on out here. You'd better make sense."

Barratt tried to keep his voice calm. "Some devil—" he began; and at that moment a clod of graveyard earth hit him full in the mouth. He heard Tyloe's: "What the hell, Joe?" and another voice saying: "Jesus, Chief, he got away," and then frantic weak fists were pounding at him, little red eyes were glaring into his, and fumes of stale whisky floated from a snaggletoothed mouth that

kept shouting: "What have you done with my girl? *Where's Violet?*"

It took the three of them—Barratt and the editor and Tyloe's deputy—to subdue old Prager. "He'd come to the chief to check on his daughter's disappearance," Bittman was explaining. "When he heard Tyloe was investigating you, he insisted on coming along."

Ed Quigley had kept out of the struggle. "Can you blame him?" he grinned. "Everybody in Red Forks knows what you wanted out of Violet. Guess her old man got to wondering if you'd finally smoothtalked her out of it."

"Give Merkle a hand, Bittman," Tyloe ordered, and the editor and the deputy seized the panting Prager by his wiry wrists. "Now look, Prager. The law's in charge here, and that means me. Whatever happens to Doc Barratt is gonna happen right and proper. Whatever he knows about your girl, we're gonna find out for you."

Spent by his own violence, the old man gasped a wordless acceptance.

"Now . . . ." Tyloe's flashlight swept in a wide arc past the mausoleum, paused, returned, and focused on the entrance. The fresh scratches on the metal gleamed in the light. The other half of the jimmy was still wedged in position.

"You ain't the only one with a complaint against Barratt, Prager," the chief said slowly. "I don't know what he's done to your girl—"

Ed Quigley gave a snigger that intlicated he could guess . . . and could like what he guessed.

"—but look what the sonofabitch's been doing to my family! God damned grave robber! Trying to break into our mausoleum!"

"I've tried to tell you," Rod began firmly. "The message said she was . . . out here. I had to try everything. I—"

"Oh you all *talk* so much," Polly burst in. "Mr. Tyloe, can't you see it's no time for talking? Marjorie's out here. The time's running out. We've got to . . . to know."

Tyloe's flash had slipped up a little. The angel's marble sinper seemed not vacuous now, but leering—flaunting its knowledge of the secrets of the mausoleum, caressing the jest of the living in the house of the dead. Barratt heard the voices swirl around him—Bittman logically pressing the necessity for thorough investigation, Ed Quigley contemptuously pooh-poohing, Sylvia emotional and urgent—but his mind was in the mausoleum, dreading its own thoughts.

He was almost surprised when he realized that the whole group was moving toward the entrance.

"O.K.," Jim Tyloe was saying heavily. "O.K., folks, I'll show you. We'll get rid of this damned side-issue and settle down to getting a clear story out of Barratt."

There was the rattle of keys, the click of a lock, the creak of rusty hinges. As the door swung open, Barratt found Jim Tyloe's sturdy arm barring his way.

"I'll look around," Tyloe said. "I don't know as they'd like strangers prowling around in here."

So Tyloe was the first to see Violet Prager. No one could tell a reaction from that massive back, but they all could hear an "Oh . . . !" pitched an octave higher than the normal Tyloe voice. They sensed the discovery and it was a lodestone. Even Tyloe could not hold back the strangers pressing into his mausoleum.

Barratt's first reaction was relief. The finding of no living sleeping child could have fetched forth that high-

pitched "oh . . . !" That sound had meant tragedy, and for an instant his only feeling was gratitude that the tragedy was not his.

Old Prager knelt on the cold floor, mumbling fragments of half-recollected prayer. Bittman and the deputy stood warily beside him. The girls had retreated toward the air of the night, away from the mingled scents of old and new death. Ed Quigley's eyes were fixed on the livid bruises of the neck, as though wondering what method would most effectively eradicate them.

Jim Tyloe stood wordless, openmouthed, the key still in his outstretched hand, as though he were the perfect host welcoming Violet Prager to the chill bosom of his family dead.

## VIOLET PRAGER

SYLVIA STEVENSON said I felt the way I did because it had rained that afternoon Dr. Barratt fired me. Sylvia called it a "psychic scar." Anyway, I always hated him worse on dark, rainy days. Sometimes I hated him till my head ached.

People in Red Forks said Violet Prager wasn't bright, but I was bright enough to tell them about Dr. Barratt. Sylvia, I think, was the only person who knew the truth.

I can still see Dr. Barratt standing there, handsome and hard, that marked-up letter in his hand. Even before he said anything, I could tell he was fixing to fire me. Just because I couldn't remember the difference between "affect" and "effect."

Nasty and cruel, that's what he was, for all his fine bedside manners. It didn't mean anything to him my

trying so hard to please. Never once did he notice my hair combed in a stylish new up-do the way Sylvia was wearing hers; or me buying that red silk dress I couldn't afford. All Dr. Barratt cared about was spelling. Suppose I *had* spelled pulmonary with two "l's" and allergy with one? Anybody can make mistakes, can't they? When he bounced me, he didn't have to pretend he was sorry for me, either; and then go and refuse to give me a letter of recommendation.

"I wish I could, Violet," he said, shaking his head as if I was somebody he couldn't quite make out. Then he put that bedside smile on his face to make you believe everything'll be fine and wonderful, with his eyes lighting up a little and crinkling. "Just between the two of us," he said, "I've an idea you don't get much of a boot out of this sort of work, anyway. Come clean. It's been dull for you, hasn't it? Why don't you try and get back your old job at the Creamery? I know Chuck Hassel out there. You're quick with your hands. I'd tell him I'd bet on you to make malted milks and shakes with the best. What do you say?"

I did hate him, then. Why should I have to go back to that Creamery, with the smell of rotten milk in my nose all day long? It wasn't my fault that I lived in the Shacks, or that Pa got himself swacked too often. I was good and sick of people treating me like dirt. Oh, it wouldn't have hurt Dr. Barratt none to have kept me on until Polly Neale got back from her vacation. Then I could have held up my head when I walked down Main Street—especially since everybody knew about Sylvia getting me this job.

Lots of people in Red Forks couldn't understand Sylvia bothering with me, she being so much smarter and coming from a better family and all that. But we had

been friends ever since I was in the second grade. In those days I had plenty of friends. I had been the most popular kid in the Lincoln Grammar School.

Sylvia and I had gone to Red Forks High together, too. Only I wasn't popular any more, like I had been in grammar school. I still had lots of boy friends, but all the nice girls stopped going with me. They acted awful snippy, and even begrudged Sylvia being nice to me. Like that afternoon in the locker room when they thought I had gone home.

"What do you suppose Sylvia sees in that creep, Violet?" I overheard one girl ask another. And then somebody had piped up and said: "That's easy. Sylvia's a sucker for the underdog. She ought to be a social service worker."

I felt so low about that, I repeated it to Sylvia when I saw her the next day. "Just because I live in the Shacks and don't have angora sweaters and pearls," I kept telling her.

"They're jealous of you—the whole raft of them," Sylvia said, real mad-like. "It's because you rate with the boys. Anyway, Violet, what do you care what a bunch of small-town snobs say about you?"

After I left high school it seemed like all my fun was over. It wasn't just that Sylvia went East to Vassar. All the decent fellows I knew started going around with girls in their own crowd. They forgot all about me. There wasn't anybody left to date except boys who hung around the pool hall and Pa wouldn't let me step out with them.

Even after Sylvia graduated from college, I didn't see much of her. She married a big, good-looking fellow and moved away from Red Forks. Only it turned out he drank a lot—like Pa—and was a fiend. Some folks

said it was terrible the way Sylvia's husband treated her. I heard he even hit her with a golf club.

Finally, she couldn't take it any more. She got a divorce and came back home to live. But with all her trouble, Sylvia never completely forgot me.

I was working part-time in Fredericks's Drug Store the day she came in—all dressed in white with a dark green scarf around her neck. She sat down at the soda fountain and ordered a chocolate phosphate.

"You ought to learn some skill, Violet," Sylvia said, watching me—hot and mussed—set the phosphate before her. "Why don't you study stenography? You're never going to get any place this way."

I rubbed the counter slowly where the drink had slopped over. "Where would I get enough money to go to business college?" I asked her. "Pa drinks it up as fast as it comes in."

Sylvia pressed her lips together like she was kind of mad. "Why don't you borrow the money from me, then? I hear there's a first-rate business school in Marysville. You could stay with an aunt of mine and help with the housework in exchange for your room and board."

"Sylvia!" I squealed. "That would be just *wonderful*! I could pay you back out of my first good job."

Sylvia crumpled her paper napkin and dropped it in the empty glass. "We can talk about that another time," she smiled.

It was only Sylvia's encouraging letters that kept me in business college. Typing I finally caught on to, but shorthand was awful hard. There were seven hundred-and-something word signs to memorize, and my head ached nights trying to remember a few of them.

Sylvia's aunt felt sorry for me. "Why don't you just

forget the whole thing and go home?" she used to say every time I failed an important test.

But Sylvia kept writing me I just *had* to get through. She kept telling me how my whole life was going to change for the better the minute I had my diploma.

I was awful surprised to learn I had passed my final examinations—even if it *was* just by the skin of my teeth. It made me feel real good.

"People in Red Forks," I wrote Sylvia, "will have to change their minds about little Violet Prager not being bright."

You see, I didn't know, then, that I would have trouble remembering all those things I learned in business school. How was I to know that most of it would slip right out of my head?

It wasn't easy getting a good job in the city. There were too many other stenographers all looking for the same thing. Bosses, mostly, wanted girls with experience. Those that didn't were always humping on spelling and punctuation, or kicking because you used your eraser too much. They got awful mad, too, if you couldn't read back your shorthand.

Any job I could get didn't pay enough for my room and board. Finally, I saw that I'd have to go home.

"I think I can make out better in Red Forks where I know a few people and can live with my folks," I wrote Sylvia.

Sylvia met me at the Station wearing a gorgeous gray suit with brown fur over the hips and on the hat. I had never seen her looking so beautiful. I remember thinking maybe I might have a chance to land a nice husband if I could earn enough to buy Sylvia's kind of clothes.

Right on top of that, it was kind of depressing hav-

ing Sylvia tell me about that opening at the Creamery.

"I know it isn't 'what we want, Violet," she tried to cheer me. "But it will tide you over until we can locate a stenographic job. Don't worry—I'm going to keep my eyes open."

And then one day last September, Sylvia walked into the Creamery in a new navy-and-pink outfit and told me about that job in Dr. Barratt's office. The job I just lost.

"I've talked Dr. Barratt into letting you act as relief secretary when Polly Neale goes on her vacation," Sylvia broke me the good news. "How does that strike you, Violet?"

I put down the double malt I was mixing because my hands had started to shake. "Oh, Sylvia!" I cried. "That would be just wonderful! Gee, thanks a lot. You make me feel I'm as good as anybody," I told her, my eyes filling up.

Sylvia looked a little sad, like she always did when I talked like that.

"Don't be silly," she said in her no-nonsense voice. "We're doing Dr. Barratt a favor. I told him a pretty girl like you will be a happy addition to his office. Between you and me, Polly Neale is a little on the somber side." But Sylvia said it with such a friendly wink, I knew folks were wrong thinking she was jealous of Dr. Barratt's secretary.

"Unfortunately, it's only for one month," Sylvia had pointed out. "But it's your chance to get a good letter of recommendation. When you've earned that, you can march into Marysville and take on a job in a hospital—or maybe some big specialist will hire you."

"But suppose I don't suit Dr. Barratt?" I remember worrying. "Medical dictation is a hard kind."

Nonsense Sylvia pool poohed. You didn't go through business school to develop cold feet at this stage of the game.

• Yes but I've been fired so many times. I reminded her feeling sort of tired just thinking about it. The textile firm wanted more experience. That old attorney said I'd never make a stenographer at all. Even the fight promoter.

• Sylvia wouldn't listen. That's all behind you, she told me. This town's going to be proud of you yet. Then when I still wasn't sure. Oh see here. Sylvia had protested. You're not going to let me down.

Only it turned out I had let Sylvia down. All because Dr. Barratt wouldn't give me that letter of recommendation. I didn't see how I was going to face those other people I had told either. I'd been saying, over and over, that when Polly Neale came back I was taking my letter of recommendation and going away to a big city to get me a job in a doctor's office.

That's why I couldn't forgive Dr. Barratt. He was shunning me in front of the whole town. And what's more, he didn't care. He didn't want me to get any where or be anybody.

I remember rushing out of his office, not even taking my coat or umbrella. It was raining cats and dogs outside, and my hair started flowing all over my face. That's when I ran into Ella Lindstrom who used to work with me at the Creamery. Ella was all wrapped in a white cellophane rain cape. She was holding the hood on her head with both hands.

Hey Vi, what's the matter? she stopped me. 'What you crying about?

I'm not crying,' I said, wiping my eyes fast with the back of my hand. I didn't want Ella knowing that

Dr. Barratt had fired me. Ella had been sort of looking up to me since I'd gone to work in a doctor's office.

"How's the new job?" Ella wanted to know. "Better than soda-jerking?"

She stood there waiting for me to answer. I didn't know what to say. I didn't want Ella to go back to thinking I was dumb.

"I quit," I said, swallowing hard.

Ella started to laugh. "Quit? A swell job like that? Who you kidding?"

It was cold and I began to shiver. "Honest, Ella!"—she just *had* to believe me— "Doctor Barratt was awful fresh. He—he made passes at me."

I can still see Ella's eyes, brown and popping, staring at me. I could tell she *did* think it funny my being out in the rain in just my peasant blouse and skirt, with my hair blowing in all directions.

"Gee, you poor kid!" she burst out. "Aren't men the skunks! I guess Doc Barratt's no exception."

"Oh, I told him off, all right," I assured Ella. "You should of heard me. That's why I couldn't ask him for a letter of recommenda—"

But Ella wasn't listening to me, any more. She had spotted Jean Tyloe across the street, and was making a beeline over there. I knew it wouldn't be long before my story would be all over town.

On the way home I met other people—important people like Ed Quigley—who wanted to know why I was out in the rain without a coat or anything. I told them all the same thing. It came out easy after awhile. Nobody blamed me for quitting my job. They thought Dr. Barratt was a rat and a disgrace to Red Forks. Some folks even said they would never send for him again.

I knew I wasn't being fair to Dr. Barratt. I knew I was doing him a terrible wrong. But, for some reason I wasn't able to figure, this only made me hate him even more.

I ran into Sylvia the next afternoon when I was looking at slips in the Bon Ton. Sylvia, I thought, seemed a little cool when I spoke to her.

"I guess you heard I lost my job," I began unhappily, "but it wasn't my fault, you see—"

"I'm sorry about that," Sylvia stopped me. "If it's anybody's fault, I guess it's mine. I shouldn't have insisted on Dr. Barratt hiring you. I shouldn't have bullied you into taking the job. It was a mistake, all around, Violet."

"That's okay, Sylvia," I said, my eyes filling up. "I'm glad you're not mad or anything."

"I *am* furious about one thing, though," Sylvia made it clear. "Those lies you're spreading about Dr. Barratt. I certainly don't want *him* to hear about it. You know there isn't a grain of truth in what you're saying. It's bound to do him a great deal of harm. I want you to stop it, Violet." And buttoning the collar of her black coat, Sylvia walked out of the store without even asking me if I was going her way.

Which gave me another reason, if I needed it, for hating Dr. Barratt. Sure, I thought, I can quit telling that story. There's enough other people in this town to keep repeating it for me.

Pa heard it down at the Tavern a few nights later. The next morning he started yelling at me when I came into the kitchen.

"What's this I hear about you and Doc Barratt?" Pa hollered. "Why wasn't I told about these indecent advances?"

The way Pa looked, with his eyes so small and red, scared the daylights out of me. Pa had a terrible fierce temper.

I slid the morning off a chair and sat down. I poured a cup of coffee. 'I can take care of myself, Pa,' I tried to tell him. 'You don't have to worry about me.'

But Pa just wouldn't be still. He got madder and madder and began pounding the table with his hairy fist. Ma told him to look out or he'd smash the sugar bowl.

Pa didn't pay any heed to her. They was laughing about you down at the Tavern. He kept yelling at me. 'It's all over town about you and the Doc. I'm how do you do?' Pa went on. 'Haven't I always warned you a poor girl's got nothing but her good name?'

Ma came from the stove and dumped Pa's eggs on his plate. 'There, no call to get so excited, Pa.' She tried to calm him. 'Violet ain't working for Doc Barratt any more. I've already told you she quit him.'

Pa didn't touch his eggs. He never did trust Doc Barratt none. Pa reminded Ma not since the time the doc wanted to take out his appendix.

I'm gonna fix Doc Barratt good one of these days. Pa shouted. 'I'll get even with the dirty bastard, just wait and see.'

For heaven sake, eat your breakfast and quit talking so wild. Ma tried to shut him up. 'No real fun's been done.'

But Pa said nobody could fool around with his daughter and get away with it. Men like Doc Barratt should be taught a lesson they wouldn't soon forget, Pa said.

I tried awful hard not to mind about getting fired. Only the doctor's office had been such a grand place to

work. All those nice refined people coming in with their nerves and their gall bladders and treating me like I was somebody. I even missed little Marjorie, Doctor Barratt's kid.

Mrs. Kushins, the doctor's housekeeper, used to bring Marjorie down to the office almost every afternoon. Sometimes it was to leave her while Mrs. Kushins went to the dentist and sometimes it was to get Marjorie her whooping cough shots.

After Marjorie had her shot I used to take her across to the five and dime and buy her soda pop or some little toy—a Mozart Goose book, or a set of red dishes for her doll house. Little things like that. It was lots of fun.

Can we go over to the store now, Violet? she used to beg running over to my desk, her round face shining. Can we? Huh? Can we?

That made me feel awful good. Polly Neale I knew, had never bought Marjorie any treats for all Miss Neale could spell and punctuate.

The way the doctor's patients smiled when they saw Marjorie and me go out together used to make me feel almost like one of the family. So you see, though I hated Dr. Barratt I never had anything against his little kid. Nobody could have made me harm a hair of Marjorie's pretty head. No, on purpose, that is.

It seemed I was more lonely some than ever after Doctor Barratt fired me. For all I knew he had turned Sylvia against me, too, for I hadn't seen her since that day in the Bon Ton.

I used to sit at our parlor window for hours, thinking how mean Dr. Barratt was. Seems as if I didn't care what happened any more. I couldn't even get up enough ambition to go out and hunt for another job—no matter how hard Majawed.

It was one of those dark, stormy-looking days that always made me feel extra low, when I got the phone call. It was some guy who said he had a job for me if I would meet him at quarter to five at the Community Church on Elm street.

At first, I said I wouldn't. I thought it kind of queer his not telling his name, and asking me to park my car around off Spruce street where it wouldn't be seen.

But he claimed he had a good reason for this, and would explain it after I showed up.

What did I have to lose, I asked myself, thinking fast. There couldn't be any harm meeting a guy at church.

"Okay," I agreed finally.

"I'll be waiting on the side porch," he told me. "The one covered with the trumpet vine. And remember, keep this under your hat. Not a word to a soul."

There wasn't anybody at home to tell, anyway. Ma and Pa were next door having a beer with the Bentleys.

I left a note on the kitchen table telling Ma I had a business date around five and was taking the car. Then, because it looked like it was going to rain any minute, I put on my goloshes, and my dark blue coat, and got Pa's jalopy out of the garage.

It was exactly quarter to five when I opened the screen door of the church porch. It must have started to rain just then, because I could hear drops hitting the trumpet vine.

Just like he told me, he was waiting inside

"Hello, Violet," he smiled, getting off the wicker chair where he had been sitting. "I hope you remembered to park your car around on Spruce."

"Oh, it's you!" I said, letting him see how relieved I was. "Why all the mystery?"

He said he wanted to play a joke on Dr. Barratt. Only, he didn't smile, or nothing, when he said it, like people do who are going to play a joke.

• "What kind of a joke?" I asked, surprised, thinking maybe Sylvia had put him up to it. He didn't say so, but Sylvia was about the only person in Red Forks who knew Dr. Barratt well enough to pull a joke. Though, of course, he could have been doing it for anyone, or maybe it was just his own idea. I didn't like to ask.

"We're going to pretend Doctor Barratt's baby is lost," he said in a soft low voice.

"Okay," I told him. "Where do I come in?" In case it had been Sylvia's idea, I didn't think I should refuse. I figured maybe this might make Sylvia and me friends again.

He sat down in the wicker chair and motioned me to take the other one.

"The child knows you," he was saying, "it ought to be fairly easy."

I nodded my head. "Oh sure. The kid and I used to have swell times together."

I was thinking I could take Marjorie home for a few hours and play game or something, until it was time to bring her back.

"If it's to go off right, we must get the child immediately," he said, staring at nothing over my shoulder. "I'll tell you exactly what you're to do." He was looking at me now, and speaking very slow. "When you go to the Doctor's house, you're to say . . .

He went over it, again and again, until my head began to ache.

"Look," I said finally, "you don't have to keep telling it to me. I know what to say."

He shut his mouth after that and got up.

"Very well. Now, one last 'thing. The minute the child falls asleep, ride out of town until you come to the sign that says: RED FORKS—1 MILE. Turn in there to the left. I'll be waiting around the bend." And without another word, he opened the side door and stepped into the church.

I went back to my car and started for Dr. Barratt's house. It was raining good and hard now. Listening to it beat down on top of the car, I got to thinking all over again how I hated Dr. Barratt. I kept wishing I could make him feel bad, the way he was making me feel. It would do him good, I thought, to worry a little for a change. It would serve him right for the way he had treated me.

The doctor's sedan wasn't out in front and the open garage was empty. I was sure that he wasn't home, so I rang the bell.

Mrs. Kushins, the housekeeper, answered it. Mrs. Kushins was fat and dish-faced. I never liked her very much.

"Well, Violet," she said, "what can I do for you?"

I remembered what he had told me to say. "I come to take Marjorie over to Sylvia Stevenson's for dinner. The doctor sent me for her."

Mrs. Kushins tossed her head and mumbled something about children being better off at home on a night like this. But I guess she didn't dare tell me Marjorie couldn't go.

"Wait here a minute," Mrs. Kushins said crossly. "I'll get the child ready."

I was kind of nervous waiting all alone in Dr. Barratt's living-room. I hadn't been told what to say should the doctor come home unexpectedly and find me there.

I was sure glad when Mrs. Kushins brought Marjorie

in. Marjorie looked like a fat little angel in her pink snowsuit with the hood over her curly head. She was carrying her favorite Teddy bear.

"Hi, Violet," she cried, running over to me. "Did you bring any soda pop? Did you? Huh?"

I wasn't easy in my mind until Mrs. Kushins closed the front door after us. Even then I had a feeling she was watching me through the lace curtain on the door.

Marjorie sat beside me on the front seat, jabbering away a mile a minute. She was awful excited about going out to dinner so late. She felt like a real big girl.

I drove past the business district and out of town a few blocks before I remembered that other thing I had been told to do. I didn't like the idea very much, though I didn't see any real harm in it. He had said positively it couldn't hurt Marjorie none. It was just something to make her sleep.

"The child might be difficult to manage," was how he put it. "You see, it's around her bedtime, and she's apt to be tired and cranky. It will be easier to play our little joke if she's asleep."

So, as soon as I came to the empty lots at the edge of town, I stopped the car and felt around in my purse for the pill he had given me.

"Marjorie," I smiled down at the kid, "about that soda pop—I happen to have some right here in the car. And a piece of candy, too," I added, holding up the small white pill.

"Can I have it now? Can I?" Marjorie asked, bouncing up and down on the seat. "It won't spoil my dinner. Violet."

I opened my bottle of pop with the beer opener Pa had in the car.

"You've never had a piece of candy just like this,"

I told Marjorie. "You're not supposed to bite it. This kind has to be put on your tongue and swallowed with a big swallow of pop—otherwise it won't go down."

Marjorie thought we were playing some brand new game. "I can do it, Violet," she said, sticking out her pink tongue for the pill and taking a gulp from the bottle of pop I held to her mouth.

"I like jelly beans better," Marjorie said, looking a little cheated after the pill was gone.

Shortly after that she began yawning and rubbing her eyes. But I didn't start the car. I kept telling her about Goldilocks and the Three Bears, and the one about Cinderella.

When I was sure she was dead to the world, I started the car again, driving out of town until I came to the sign that said: RED FORKS—1 MILE. Then, I turned left like he told me.

He was waiting in his car, around the bend, and tipped me the wink to follow him.

I was a little surprised at his turning in at that deserted side road that goes up to the cemetery. Not that I bothered much about it at the time. You see, there were a few old houses scattered in through there, and I thought, maybe, he was going to let Dr. Barratt worry a while, and then put in a phony sick call from one of those houses. The way I figured it, bringing Dr. Barratt all the way out here, to get Marjorie, must be the joke.

It was nearly half-past five now and still raining real hard. I guess that's what made it so dark. I leaned forward and turned on my headlights, but when he noticed this he stopped his car and came back and made me shut them off.

"Just follow my brake lights," he told me.

Driving on a wet slippery road like that would have been hard enough even *with* headlights. Pa's tires were no the too good, and the hills were full of unexpected curves.

It seemed we kept going up and down, and up again. Lonesome it was, too, with Marjorie fast asleep beside me. I kept thinking how the lights down in the valley seemed a million miles away.

My windshield wiper began to stick. It was terrible hard to see where I was going. That's why I didn't notice how far we had come until we were almost at the cemetery gate.

I just couldn't understand what we were doing way up here. There wasn't a house anywhere near—except the caretaker's—and he wasn't around. His place was pitch dark.

The car ahead of me had already disappeared through the open cemetery gate. I kept squinting through my cloudy windshield, trying to see where he had parked, but his car seemed to have disappeared completely.

It was awful quiet way up there, with nothing but the wind and those whispering trees. I began thinking maybe I shouldn't have come up here alone with him. It struck me that maybe I did not want to play this joke as much as I thought I did.

I had already put my car in reverse, and was trying to turn it around to go back, when, suddenly, the door on Marjorie's side opened, and he climbed in beside her without making any sound at all.

"It's all right, Violet," he said in his soft voice. "Just drive right in there and park out of sight under those willow trees. See, over there, near the pond."

I didn't want to do that. I didn't see why I should. But he was so soft-spoken and all, I didn't know how to refuse. I just did what he told me.

I had hardly got the brake on my car before he said: "Pick up the child and come with me."

Something in his voice made my heart beat awful fast. I couldn't figure what he intended to *do*! But when I saw he was heading in the direction of the caretaker's cottage, I felt better. I picked up Marjorie and came along. I figured he probably had the key to the caretaker's place and was going to wait for Dr. Barratt there.

Only he stopped *before* we reached the cottage. I knew, then, that something was wrong. Awful wrong. Because he was standing directly over an open grave. *And there was an empty coffin in it!*

"Let's have the child," he said to me in a very funny voice.

I didn't know what to say. Here he had been pretending this was all a joke. And expecting me to help him. "Oh, God," I thought. "what'll I *do*?" 'Cause I knew, no matter what, I had to try to save Marjorie. She wouldn't have been here at all if it hadn't been for me.

My best bet, I figured, was to run back and try to reach my car. "If only I can make it," I prayed, turning with Marjorie in my arms.

I don't know how many pounds the kid weighed. It seemed like a ton. But I ran as fast as I could. And all the time he was coming after me. Not fast. Hardly running at all. As if he knew he had all the time in the world; that no matter how fast I ran, we couldn't get away from him.

Marjorie's dead weight made my arms ache something terrible. My breath began hurting me in my

chest. My legs felt slow and heavy, like I was running before a slow-motion camera. But I kept on trying to reach the car.

"And then, finally, I was there. I managed to jerk open the door and get Marjorie inside on the seat. But before I could jump in myself and start it, he got to me.

I screamed and screamed, but nothing came out. It was like one of those awful nightmares you have when you're a kid. *I couldn't make any sound come out!*

I was frightened now out of my wits. I even forgot about Marjorie. I just wanted to get away—to save myself. I began to run. My goloshes were old and slippery and I fell. I hit my head against a tombstone, but I didn't feel anything.

I got up fast and tried to run again. But it was no use. I couldn't get away. I could feel his hands—his cold, bony hands—at my throat.

## THE MARBLE FOREST

### XV • 12.55 A.M. to 1.05 A.M.

BARRATT's first glimpse of the body left no doubt as to the diagnosis, but habit impelled him forward. Even Tyloe made no move to stop him.

Then he rose from his examination of Violet's body and stated: "She's dead." His voice was louder than he had intended, the loudness emphasized the obviousness

and inadequacy of the statement. "Strangulation," he added.

"Well," said Jim Tyloe ponderously. "I guess you ought to know."

Tyloe's voice seemed the signal for the group to come back to life. Barratt felt their movement, felt eyes fixing on him. The dumb anguish of old Prager's stare, the skeptical objectiveness of Bittman, the half-envious leer of Ed Quigley. . . . Polly's eyes kept shifting back and forth between his face and Violet's, as though for the first time seeing them joined as they must have been linked in Red Forks gossip.

"What is that supposed to mean, Mr. Tyloe?" There was something imperious in Sylvia's voice.

"It ain't hard to figure, is it, ma'am? You don't really think it's hard to figure? We just got things hindsided, like. We find him here at the mausoleum, so we think he's trying to break in. When all the time he'd stashed this poor girl away in here, and we caught him when he was just locking up."

"Nonsensel" Barratt exploded. "I begged you to open up here!"

"That was a smart move, Doc, damned smart. Figured I wouldn't have no truck with breaking into my own folks' sleep. Well, I fooled you—and now we got you cold. I guess there ain't no need to hear your pretty bedtime story now."

"Look." Barratt struggled to sound objective. "This poor child has been lying here, in this same position, for hours since she died. Rigor's well advanced. The medical evidence is unquestionable."

"Sure, sure. Lucky you're the one that's giving that evidence, ain't it?"

"Mr. Quigley," Sylvia interposed smoothly, "you know

about things . . . like this. Isn't what Dr. Barratt says true?"

Ed Quigley shifted under her steady gaze. "It's hard to say, ma'am. Things like this, shucks, doctors don't always agree themselves. They're tricky when they're dead—can't tell nothing about 'em sometimes."

Old Brager was still trying to pray. Jim Tyloe took one resolute step toward the doctor.

"Polly!" Barratt said. "You'll back me up—Gramp said there were figures hanging around the mausoleum here, long before we came out to the cemetery."

"Yes. . . ." said Polly. "He did say that."

"That's it," he went on more confidently. "Maybe some of you can get something out of old Hummel—more than he was willing to tell us. We'll go over to his cottage; maybe he's coming around by now."

"Coming around?" Tyloe repeated the two words with ponderous force.

"You know Hummel," Barratt added hastily. "He'd been drinking, brooding about his daughter, I guess. . . . Hell, he was half crazy. He went for me with his rifle; I had to grab it and sock him one with it."

"Nice peaceable character, ain't you?" Tyloe grunted. "Don't seem to be really healthy for anybody to know you, Doctor." He stressed the last word with the irony of a reasonably subtle hippopotamus.

Ed Quigley picked up the cue for humor. "Good for business, anyway," he sniggered.

"Gentlemen!" Barratt had never heard quite such a whiplash quality in Bittman's voice. "Is the *Sentinel* to carry a story explaining the truth of tonight's goings-on, or is it to run the snappy small talk of the chief and his relatives instead of the boiler-plate comics? If Hummel knows anything, let's for God's sake check it."

Tyloe looked as nearly sheepish as a Tyloe could. "O K.," he grunted. "Joe, you stay here and watch the place, Prager, you better come along with us; you ain't doing the poor kid no good here."

Old Prager rose feebly, "I don't get it," he said. "She never hurt nobody. . . I don't get it . . . not any of it. . . . But when I do. . . ."

"Come along," Jim Tyloe ordered. "Everybody!"

Gramp Hummel was stretched out face up on the couch in the caretaker's cottage. Barratt felt relieved. This meant the old man had been well enough to get himself inside after they had—possibly too callously, Barratt now began to feel—dumped him on the porch.

The little room looked just as it had when they'd invaded it to telephone; but there was something odd about it—a silence. . . . Barratt was advancing to the couch when he felt Tyloe's broad hand shoved against his chest.

"No you don't," the chief grunted. "We've had enough of your medical evidence tonight. F'd, you take a look at old Hummel—see how bad he got hit."

There was something more wrong than the silence. Barratt's eyes flicked hastily about the room. That rifle—he'd swear he'd left it somewhere outside in the bushes. And there was something about the telephone.

. . .

"Don't seem to be breathing," Quigley observed, almost with satisfaction.

It looked like any wall phone that you could see anywhere in Red Forks, but somehow it held Barratt's eye. It looked like any . . . That was it . . . that was what . . .

Quigley needed to say nothing as he lifted old Hum-

mel's head. No medical evidence was necessary to persuade anyone that a skull cannot house a living brain when it has been battered in from behind.

"Socked him one, huh?" Tyloe's voice rasped.

Barratt's head swam. Somewhere, underneath, he realized with regret that Violet and Hummel were dead, that something was at large in this cemetery, some business prowling in the darkness, that had destroyed them. But all he could think was that the discovery of these bodies stood between him and the finding of Marjorie, that the dead had joined forces to fight him—pretty, silly Violet, sullen, wretched Hummel—all the dead leagued together to hold him away from Marjorie until she should be one of them.

Dimly he realized that Polly was speaking "Yes. . . . He was alive after Dr Barratt hit him. At least he was gone from the porch when I went by."

And Bittman was saying, calmly, analytically, as though he were simply composing an editorial: "That was when you left Barratt alone out here? And you say that Hummel was muttering something like accusations against Barratt?"

"I don't know . . . ! Polly's voice was anguished. "It sounds awful when you say it. when you take it out cold and look at it like that. It sounds . . ."

"I know," the editor said unhappily.

"And he didn't seem to care when he hit the old man. He was hardly human, he—"

Barratt thrust his hands out, almost as though to dispel the horde of dead who hampered him. "Good God!" he cried. "Human! Polly, let's make sense. There's no time for anything but our job. We're going to find Midge. The hell with the rest of this."

"You're good, Barratt," Jim Tyloe said admiringly. "Damned if I don't almost believe you. But I, guess we've heard enough. How about it, folks?"

There was a moment of silence. Then from the almost forgotten Prager came a choking cry: "Lynch the bastard!"

Tyloe laid a heavy hand on his holster. "Hold it, Prager. God knows I can see how you feel. If it was my kid . . . But there ain't gonna be no lynching in Red Forks while I'm around. Here in California, lynching's damn bad politics."

Barratt had reached the door before a cry from Sylvia warned him that Tyloe's revolver was out of its holster and trained on his heart. "You're coming in with me, Doc," the chief said levelly. "A little working-over in the office and maybe we'll find out just what the hell has been going on out here."

Barratt thought: "Tyloe won the sharpshooting cup at the Northern California sheriffs' convention. Run for it, and you're one of the dead yourself. You'll join up with their league, you'll enter the conspiracy to make Marjorie one of them. Stay there. Try to talk it out."

"You'll hate yourself in the morning, Tyloe," Barratt tried to force a laugh. "You'll look a fine damned fool with a murderer still at large, and one more death chalked up directly to you. Find Marjorie and you can play any damned games with me you want in your office. Bring out the rubber hose and the lighted cigarettes and your whole rotten repertory. But find Marjorie first." His grand front began to collapse. "Jesus, man! The time's running out. The air . . ."

Tyloe did not shift his aim as he moved to the door. "Joel!" he yelled toward the mausoleum. "Joe Merkle! Fetch over the handcuffs! We're pulling Barratt in."

Sylvia laid an urgent hand on Tyloe's wrist. "You can't, Mr. Tyloe! You can't do it. Give him this one chance, let him hunt tonight. Tomorrow . . . tomorrow's yours. Let him have this."

"Tomorrow's too late! When they find her tomorrow, it'll . . . Hell, Jim, you can't do it. You can't pull him in yet!"

"This is it," Barratt thought. "Now I have gone mad, now nothing makes sense." For this was Ed Quigley's high nervous voice urging mercy for him. Ed had betrayed the dead, Ed had broken from their league, Ed was pleading for Marjorie's life.

Jim Tyloe stared for a long minute before he said: "You gone nuts?"

"He's right, Jim." Quigley's yellow face twisted as though he found the admission hard to force out. "I like he says, it's the air. It won't be long now. After that, hell . . . But just for a little . . . You can't pull him in!"

The jangle of the handcuffs had announced Merkle's entrance like a sound cue. "Here you are, Chief."

"Hold it, Joe," Tyloe said slowly. "Looks like I got a little convincing to do I wasn't counting on. You're going in all right, Doc. But just so there's no hard feelings, I'm gonna lay everything on the line first. And nobody's interrupting me." His right hand emphasized, by a casual movement, that the revolver covered the entire group.

"Now listen, Ed. And anybody else that has any doubts. You and me, Ed, we know just what kind of a sonofabitch this is. We know what happened to Nancy, don't we? We know how things were between him and Violet. We know he had damned good reasons for wanting her out of the way. And we know that he was the

only person in all Red Forks that could want to do her harm.

"We had a city lawyer up here once on a murder trial and there was a lawbook word he kept using. It was Latin or something, and I don't rightly remember it; but it meant, who gets something out of it? What's in it for who? So who got something out of Violet's death? Doc Barratt, and not a damned soul else.

"Then there's old Hummel here. Didn't do nobody much good while he was alive, but didn't do no harm either. Only he saw somebody out here, and he was trying to tell something about the doc. So who got something out of Hummel's death? Nobody but Doc Barratt.

"And what else happened tonight?" He paused. "This is where it gets kind of rough, folks. I'd hate like hell to say a thing like this about any man living. But it's got to be said. What else happened? Little Marjorie Barratt disappeared.

"Now Doc's put on one sweet hell of an act. It's got disguised voices on the telephone and mysterious shapes flitting around graveyards and everything else he ever heard on the radio. He's torn up this whole damned cemetery looking for that baby, and even taken time out to dump a corpse in my mausoleum while he was about it. It's all pretty impressive, but has he found the baby? No. She's still missing. That's another of tonight's facts: Marjorie's gone. And what's in it for who?"

"Christ, Tyloe—"

"What's in it for who?" Tyloe repeated harshly, as his revolver swung on Barratt and checked him in his forward surge. "I guess most of you've heard that Alice Barratt put all her money in a trust fund for the kid. I pick up things around the bank—I guess you've heard this too, Ed—and I know that the money goes to Doc

here if anything happens to the baby. So who gets something out of getting rid of Marjorie?"

For a moment Barratt wondered if he were going to be physically sick. The league of the dead was clean and sweet beside this.

"Now Doc's a smart man," Tyloe was saying. "We'll all admit that. He needed to get rid of Violet and he needed to get rid of his own kid. So like a smart man, he worked out a scheme that'd take care of 'em both at once. That's playing it wise. Hummel was an accident—that wasn't so smart, because it happened when he was out here alone and it pins it on him cold. Heard enough now, folks?"

It was the longest speech of Jim Tyloe's official career. He rocked back on his heels as though smugly confident of its effect.

But: "No," said Sylvia quietly, "I haven't heard enough, Chief. I don't think I ever could hear enough to convince me that Dr. Barratt would do such a thing."

Tyloe grinned broadly. "We all know how you feel, Mrs. Stevenson. I guess it's understandable," he added tolerantly, "but we can't let that get in the way of us thinking straight."

"O.k." Tim Bittman put in rapidly. "Let's have a little straight thinking. Whoever killed Violet Prager must have done it almost as soon as she got out here with the child; the body was cold when we found it. Now I gather that Barratt's been with Miss Neale ever since this . . . this thing started. How about that, Tyloe?"

"How about that, Miss Neale?" Tyloe was a complacent enough echo. "Doc been with you right along?"

"Of . . . of course," Polly hesitated. "Up until I went back to town just now."

"And back at the beginning there? When Violet musta been driving out here?" He let a parody of a smile twist his face while he was waiting for an answer. "Just remember, Miss, you're gonna have to answer this same question under oath sometime."

"I haven't made a time-table!" she snapped suddenly. "I don't know just what was when. It was about then that the doctor was driving around trying to track down Violet; I didn't have my eye on him every minute. So what harm is there in that?"

"Surc," said Tyloe. "Perfectly harmless. That's why you out and said it so easy. No hesitation at all. And how about the famous phone call, Miss Neale? That come when Doc was out traipsing around too?"

"Well, yes. . . ."

"Surely you'd know Barratt's voice," Bittman put in.

"I . . . it was muffled, almost disguised; I couldn't possibly swear to who it was—or wasn't."

"So," said Tim Bittman tonelessly.

"Polly!" Barratt burst out. "How in God's name can you—"

"He asked me, Rod."

"Watch it, Barratt," Tyloe growled.

"How can you think for a moment that I could have any hand in this filthy business? How can you stand there pandering to this lout's accusations when you know we should be out there—" The thought of *out there*—of what waited out there and how little time it had to wait—choked him. His eyes blurred for an instant; in the dizzy silence his ears heard Sylvia's quivering: "Polly, how could you—"

The girl flared up. "I'm afraid I couldn't ever live up to your standards of womanliness, Sylvia; I happen to give a small damn for the truth."

"Well," Jim Tyloe announced stolidly, "let's get going."

But Ed Quigley's face was twisting like a yellow rubber mask that had overheated. "Tomorrow. . . ." he repeated in a stubborn squeal. "You gotta wait, Jim. You gotta give him time."

Tomorrow . . . A thought stirred in Barratt's mind—the picture of another who was to join the league here tomorrow. Somehow that meant something, something for Marjorie. . . . What had Quigley said earlier?

Ed Quigley was half babbling now. Even on the night of Nancy's death, Barratt had not seen him so deeply moved. "My watch!" he was squealing irrelevantly. "I smashed it trying to break out of that damned room. But you've got a watch, Jim. You know it ain't time yet! You can't let him—"

"Come on, Barratt!" Tyloe grunted.

"Just a minute." Barratt's thought had jelled. Now, for the first time that evening, he spoke and moved with certainty. "I'm going to talk, and the only way you'll stop me is with that revolver. And I don't think the press would back up any story of 'shot while attempting escape.'"

Tyloe looked at his watch. "Five minutes," he said grudgingly.

Ed Quigley gasped a little sigh.

"It won't take that long. First, let's admit I'm as prime a sonofabitch as any Tyloe thinks I am. Let's pretend I'm a sinister character who latches after secretaries and beats up old men. Let's even say I'm a lousy doctor who kills off his patients. But look: You know Midge. You've all met her. You know how she prattles and how she runs to meet you, and laughs, and—Holy God! Is there a one of you who can stand there

and look at me and seriously think that for a few thousand bucks I could—" Even the words wouldn't come out.

No one answered him. No one but Sylvia met his eye. He went on more calmly. "That's out then. That I didn't do. Someone else stole Marjorie; and whatever crimes I've committed, she's not going to pay for them. Now are you going to stand here and let a two-for-a-nickel small town bigshot build his ego, or are you going to pitch in with me and save Marjorie from the league—save her life, I mean? Especially when I tell you that now I know where she is?"

"Rod!" Polly cried. "You've figured it? Oh, where!"

Barratt smiled. It seemed a long time since he'd used those muscles. "That's my girl," he said. "I knew you'd come back. Bittman?"

"If you think you know where she is—"

"I'm certain now. It was everybody saying *tomorrow* that started me thinking straight. If this devil's plan was devised to torture me, there'd be no pleasure if Marjorie wasn't found. I'd go on hoping for years, keeping detectives on her trail, hunting through orphanage records, living on hope. She had to be found and soon, so that I'd know I'd failed. And what happens here in the cemetery tomorrow?"

"The Whittleby burial," Bittman said promptly. "I'm giving it front page coverage with pictures. Local hero."

"You'd have had a front page story all right. That's where Marjorie is. And where we're going—now!"

"But Rod," Polly protested, "we looked in the empty grave."

"Not the grave. That's the neatness of it. What else happens tomorrow? They shovel back into the grave the pile of excavated dirt beside it. That pile was of

normal size, we thought nothing could be buried under it. But there was extra earth mounded on Donna Parks's grave, and on my wife's. *Where did that dirt come from?*"

Polly's eyes lit up. "I think you've got it! Come on!"

Tyloe eyed the press suspiciously, as if figuring his best move for a good treatment. "I—" He had barely begun when old Prager cut in.

"Hell, the doc's right. He knows I ain't never had no use for him, but he's right. There ain't a man living could do . . . *that* to his own kid. Violet, she liked that Marjorie a lot. She'd want us to take a chance."

Tyloe forced a heavy laugh. "Looks like I'm outnumbered, folks."

"But Jim," Ed Quigley squeaked, "you ain't gonna let 'em push you around like this, are you? This is a crazy damned guess. We gonna stay out here all night shoveling where Doc gets him an idea?"

Tyloe looked his brother-in-law over from head to toe. "Ed," he said, finally and deliberately, "you're nuts. Come on, folks. We're giving Doc his chance. His last chance."

Barratt and the editor had seized two of old Hummel's shovels. There was a third, and Tyloe, in an excess of helpfulness, had thrust it at Joe Merkle. "Get it over with quicker," he grunted.

And quick it was. Hardly a dozen shovelfuls of earth had been removed when Bittman cried: "Hit something!"

Barratt heard the laugh again, but he took no time to look for its source. His arms worked as frantically as those of a drowning man within sight of the shore. The casket was half uncovered when he heard Tyloe mut-

ter: "Looks mighty like that one you described as stolen, Ed."

Now the casket was bare; sleek wood and smooth handles gleamed in the light of the flashes. Now Barfatt was tugging at the lid, vainly listening for a whisper of breath, while the others surged close to see.

Now the lid was raised, and all flashlights and all eyes focused upon the dry, brown, fleshless skeleton of a four-year-old child.

## XVI • CONCLUSION

THE pulse of time that had throbbed so drivingly, so relentlessly through that night had stopped now. It was as if time itself, were as dead, as long dead as those brown bones laid out so mockingly in a parody of childish sleep.

None of them knew later with any certainty just how long they stood there, frozen in the contemplation of this grisly jest. None of them knew for sure whether he had heard or imagined Merkle's retching lurch into the bushes, or Ed Quigley's obligato of quiet sniggers.

The first sharp realization was of Bittman's strained cry: "Barratt!" Jim Tyloe's head jerked up from his fixed stare. His eyes met those of the others. There was a sudden new dread in all of them.

"Rodney!" Sylvia murmured. "He's not here!"

Polly shuddered. "A gag like this . . . after what he's been through . . ."

"Tyloe!" Bittman's tone was commanding. "We've got to find the doctor. After a shock like this—"

"He wouldn't!" Sylvia protested. "He couldn't be driven to . . ." She veered away from putting it into words.

And then they heard Barratt's voice, rich with a new strength. "Here I am!"

Tyloe's flash beamed toward him, focused on the tall figure of the doctor standing rooted in unshakable power. And there was a small round figure cuddled in his arms.

Both women started toward him, but Ed Quigley was ahead of them. His voice had all the somber unction of his best professional manner. "I can't tell you how sorry I am, Doc. After all this, to be just too late. . . . You'll bear me out, I tried to hurry Jim up. . . ."

"But you're wrong, Ed." Barratt's voice was ringing. "She's alive!"

And then suddenly there was sobbing and laughing and Bittman found himself yelling out loud, frantically pumping the hand of old Prager and gulping a toast from the old man's filthy flask.

"This devil's prank in the grave had to come from somewhere," Barratt said. "I remembered finding a child's bone between this grave and the mausoleum. When the killer left Violet's body there, his eyes lit on a child's coffin and he conceived a final fiendish twist to his plot. I hurried back to the mausoleum and found the child's coffin . . . and Midget."

The little shape squirmed in his arms, and his voice changed. "She mustn't come to here, in all this. . . . Sylvia—you take the car and rush her home. Sade'll

know how to take care of her!" I'll be back as soon as I can. I still have some business here."

Sylvia's smile warmed the night. Her lips lightly brushed Barratt's as she took the child from his arms. "See you soon," she whispered, and was gone.

"That's good," Ed Quigley's voice was higher than ever, and subtly altered in some other, not quite definable way. "She was alive. She didn't belong out here."

"You can cut the act," Barratt lashed out. "It's over now. The fun's all over. It would've spoiled the fun, wouldn't it, if Tyloe had taken me in? I wouldn't have known it till much later—you'd have missed that final exquisite moment when I found her, too late. You had to keep me out here for that."

"Of course," Quigley agreed gravely. "When people make plans, they ought to stick with them."

Barratt stared at him. "You've pulled a damned funny series of switches tonight, Quigley; but they make sense according to one certain pattern—and that's the only way they do make sense. First you were against me, *check*: you wanted to see me tortured, baited, held up in my search. Then that line went too far, Tyloe was going to pull me in, and you jumped over to my defense; *check*: you had to keep me out here long enough so that you could watch me find her—too late. Then Tyloe relented, if that's the word; he saw the pressure was against him and he let me go on with the search. So you jumped the rail again and began to protest; *check*: it was still just too early, there was a bare possibility I might make the deadline—the *lifeline*—and if you could delay us five, ten minutes more you'd be sure of your gloating moment."

He paused for breath. He heard Tim Bittman start

to say: "It does check out—" and saw Polly nod, but he was in his stride. He plunged on: "All these people are witnesses that you've known too much all along. You said of Midge: 'When they find her tomorrow. . . .' That certainly could only mean one thing; the Whittleby grave and your grisly clue leading from there to the mausoleum. And again just now, when I showed up with her in my arms—everybody else thought at once that I'd saved her, you were sure she was dead. Only the killer knew that that baby coffin in the mausoleum didn't have enough air to last her till now, but even the killer didn't know that you'd bashed one side in moving it around, and air, thank God, was leaking in."

"Go on," Quigley said. His nervousness was gone; there was something almost approaching serenity about him. "I've never done better. The convention will be fascinated."

Barratt shook his head dizzily. "Well, Tyloc? Heard enough? He doesn't even deny it. We can establish the details later—just how he got poor Violet to help him in his damnable plot."

"But that was simple," Quigley volunteered helpfully. "You see, I killed her. That wasn't part of the plan, of course, that was my own idea and I must say a big improvement. Because the dead I can control. They understand me and they recognize my power."

Big Jim Tyloc had slumped. "Sure I'll pull him in Doc," he said wearily. "For what good it'll do, with him the way he is. Jesus, I been scared of something like this for years. . . ."

"He killed my Violet," old Prager was muttering tensely. "He said it. I heard him."

Barratt sighed. "He tried to kill my Marjorie. But there's nothing we can do to him now, Prager. Only a psychotic could've plotted such a crime. He was mad already. And the final shock of missing his big thrill, of seeing the whole thing go wrong when I found Midge alive . . . Well, I guess it just shoved him over. . . ."

"Come on, Ed," Tyloe urged with a newfound gentleness. "Come along with us."

"They talk," Ed murmured raptly. "That's the wonderful thing. Before I could make them look right, and then I could make them breathe, but now they talk. Just wait till the boys at the convention get a load of this!" He rubbed his hands together gloatingly. "I don't know how they'll take to this other though," he added dubiously, gesturing at the dry bones of his infant great aunt. "It was very ingenious, I don't know another man in the profession could do it—take a four-year-old and turn her right into a skeleton like that. But somehow I don't know as it has much commercial appeal."

"Come on, Ed!"

"You all want to go back to the office? Fine. You can all sleep in the coffins there, and we won't tell anybody till after the convention. You understand, don't you? You'll do just what I say!" His voice hardened on the last words.

Jim Tyloe took his arm. "Well, Doc," he turned to Barratt. "looks like I got to apologize for a boner. You got to admit things looked pretty bad there for a while—sure seemed to pile up against you."

Barratt nodded coldly.

"But now you got your kid back, and we got the guy that done it, and I guess it's all over—except for poor

Ed, here. You'll help me see this gets handled quiet-like, won't you, Doc? And you too, Bittman?"

"Just a minute, Tyloe." Barratt's voice was steel. "I'm not so damned sure we do have the guy that done it. We've got the tool, sure; but not the hand that wielded it."

Tyloe laughed. "Hey, Doc, what the hell you up to now?"

"Rod!" Polly's voice shook. "You mean it isn't . . . over yet?"

"No, Polly. We're going through to the end of this. Quigley's said a couple of funny things, Tyloe. He said: 'When people make plans, they ought to stick with them.' He sounded hurt; somebody'd planned with him and let him down. And he said killing Violet wasn't part of the plan—that was my own idea.' Somebody was behind Ed Quigley in this."

"You're crazy, Doc," Tyloe blustered. "That's the way these nuts always talk. They're always claiming God put them up to things."

"But the best parts were my own," said Ed Quigley proudly. "Nobody's gonna share any of that credit at the convention."

"Quigley!" Barratt rapped. "Who helped you think this up?"

Ed giggled. "You think I'm crazy? You think I want a patent claim fight on my hands?"

'Y'see?" Tyloe grinned.

"I don't think we'll need Ed's word on this. Let's look at it this way: Ed Quigley was a lonely man. He lived with the only people he could dominate: the dead. Who was the one man who saw him regularly? Who was the one man who had influence enough over him to use him as a cat's-paw? Who's the man who's

notorious for using a cat's-paw whenever he's got a particularly vicious job on hand? Who works through henchmen and underlings and always leaves them holding the bag? Who has a strong motive, not only against me but against Quigley? And who said just now, back in the cottage, that a smart man always plans one crime-pattern to get rid of two?"

"Hell, Doc," Tyloe laughed. "You just had too hard a night of it. You think it over in the morning—drop around and we'll have a drink and a good laugh."

Polly frowned. "I know he hates you, Rod. There was that scandal about the insulin and then there was his sister. . . . But I don't see what you mean about a motive for Quigley. . . ."

"I think I do," Bittman put in. "I hear things around the bank too. I know this monomania of Quigley's for bigger and better undertaking was draining the whole damned Quigley fortune; it had to be stopped. And we've all known Quigley was queer; Tyloe, knowing him so much better, must've sensed the final crack up that was bound to come."

"So he arranged to produce it under controlled conditions," Barratt added, "before Quigley should crack up on his own—maybe in some spectacular manner that'd blow the Quigley Tyloe empire sky-high. He planned a crime so damvably hideous that a teetering mind could hardly survive committing it. And what he's been doing out here for the last hour was goading Ed over the edge—double crossing his plan, threatening to cheat him out of the exquisite sensation of watching me find Midge too late."

"And it was so nicely economical, such a beautifully double pronged offensive. At the same time he was

enjoying his full revenge in torturing me—hoping too that he could end up driving me out of the community, maybe even out of my profession with his filthy suspicion that I might be involved in my own daughter's death."

Tyloc was no longer laughing as he looked from face to face and read the growing conviction in them. "You're nuts," he growled. "Every single one of you. Damned if I don't think Ed's the sanest man here. But let's be practical, folks. I'm gonna do what Doc did back there: admit anything you damned well please, say I'm a sonofabitch, say I did plan all this. So what court's going to listen to Ed's ravings as evidence? And what are you gonna prove anyway? Did I do anything? Or did I maybe just say something I shouldn't and where's the law against that?"

"Rod!" Polly gasped. "That can't be true! Is there really no crime that he could be charged with?"

"I'd want to talk to a lawyer," Bittman said, "but I think he's right. If he just planted suggestions, without actually planning the execution of the crime as an accessory . . ."

"Accessory, hell!" Barratt snapped. "There's a charge that'll stick on Tyloc all right. And that's first degree murder!"

For the first time Tyloc frowned. "So long as we're getting so legal, Doc, maybe you better remember about slander. You just got through proving that Ed here's the killer."

"And when Gramp Hummel was killed, Ed Quigley was locked up tight in his own embalming room. He couldn't possibly have killed Hummel."

"It doesn't really matter," Quigley conceded generously, "so long as he's dead. Does it really? But I

thought you were all in such a hurry to get back to the coffins."

"Hold it a minute, Ed," said Tyloe. "I gotta hear this latest 'brainstorm.'"

"You'll hear it all right, Tyloe, and this won't be the last time. Hummel regained consciousness and phoned you to report my assault on him and our invasion of his cemetery. You saw a wonderful opportunity to clinch the case against me—and maybe to help goad Ed over by providing him with a corpse he couldn't account for. You drove out here by the back road short cut. You found the rifle Hummel had mentioned, lying in the grass by the path, and took it in with you. Hummel had passed out again on the couch after he phoned. You lifted up his head and finished the job. Then you cleaned up and made it back to town just in time to get Sylvia's call."

"He did!" Polly cried out. "I saw his car on the way out here!"

"You can't prove it," said Tyloe. "Come along, Ed."

"Hold on. We used Hummel's phone early tonight. It's been used since then. We'd been digging, our hands were muddy, the phone got muddy, and we had no time to clean it up. The murderer saw the mud, thought it was evidence that Hummel had used the phone, and wiped it clean. He tried to erase all evidence of the phone calls; instead he proved it."

"Hell, Doc, he coulda been calling anybody."

"He'd just been attacked. Who would he call but the police? And I'm pretty damned sure, the switchboard operator'll remember a call from the cemetery to your office."

"That don't mean I took the call. I don't know about no call. Joe, you know anything about this?"

"He does," Polly said under her breath. "I heard him—but he'll deny it. . . ."

It was hardly a conscious movement of Barratt's flash, but it was as though the obscure Joe Merkle had literally stepped into the spotlight. He was fumbling with his hands and with his words.

"Sure, Chief. I know all about it." He turned apologetically to Barratt. "Y'see, Doc, I been thinking since you said about how the chief likes to leave us guys holding the bag. I ain't no dope like that dumb guy that took the insulin rap. I ain't holdin' no bags. I took that phone call and I give it to the chief and he told me not to say nothing and there was maybe a raise in it only it ain't worth it if it's a murder rap."

For a moment Tyloe's hand rested on the butt of his revolver, while his arm began to spin Ed in front of him as a shield. Then he dropped both hands to his side and advanced toward Barratt.

"I'd be sixty-nine kinds of a damned fool, wouldn't I, folks, if I shot my way out of a little jam like this? Hell, folks, I got influence in this county. The Judge knows who talked the County Central Committee into recommending his appointment. The jurors know who finds 'em jobs when times get tough. And the *Sentinel* knows what bank holds the mortgage on it." He turned to his brother in law. "Come on, Ed. We'll see how much they can do in our county."

"I won't let 'em out of their coffins," said Quigley sinugly. "Maybe I'll even take off their make-up. That'll show 'em."

The two men of power had vanished in the darkness.

"Don't look so scared, Merkle," Bittman said. "You'll find out that Tyloe's boasts of influence mean just about

as much as Quigley's plan to keep *us* in our coffins. People don't rest easy in coffins any more, they rise up and strike back at the forces that try to keep them there. 'Hell,' he broke off, "I think I've got a lead editorial there. Anyway, Bariatt, you don't need to worry about that mortgage. The *Sentinel's* your mouth-piece whenever you want it."

"Thanks."

"And look. . . . Just because I was . . . well, a little hesitant back there in the cottage, don't think I . . ."

"Skip it."

"O K." Relieved, the editor beckoned to Merkle and Prager. "Let's get going."

Bariatt and Polly had fallen a little behind the others. There was a luxury in walking through the cemetery unhurried now.

And it's night, Bariatt grinned. Still the same night. If the sun had any decent sense of proper endings, it'd be coming up now with the dawn of a new day.

"You were right, Rod," Polly said in a very small voice.

"Thank God. I was pretty damned slow about it, but we've got him now, right by the short hairs."

"Uh uh." She shook her head. "Not that I mean about . . . Sylvia. The way you gave Marjorie to her. That meant . . . giving everything, didn't it?"

Bariatt's eyes widened, as if he looked at his own action clearly for the first time. "Hell, I guess it did . . ."

"You were right," Polly repeated. "We work together perfectly, Rod. We're a team. Up to a point . . ."

But a team's all we are "I stand off and look at things—even at you. I looked at you, back in Gramp's cottage, and I didn't like what I thought I saw. I was a damned little fool but—"

Barratt took her hand. "Hell, darling, nobody was thinking straight tonight."

Uh uh. Sylvia was. And it was because she wasn't thinking. She didn't need to stand off and look at things. She just knew you were right."

The smile grew on Barratt's face.

"That's what you need," Polly went on. "A girl who doesn't have to look and think where you're concerned, who just knows . . . Suddenly she snatched her hand out of his grasp. "If you could see your smug face! You look like that simpering angel back there! Maybe you need Sylvia—but you're still going to need me to take an occasional fall out of you!"

They were at the gates of the cemetery now, and abruptly Polly was laughing, loud clear laughs such as that place had never heard before.

Barratt was looking at her closely. "What gives?"

Turn around. The sun—it must've heard your gag. Look at that red glow in the sky!

It was only later that they learned that this false dawn had its origin in the flames of the official county police car, lying beside Violet's at the foot of the cliff off Dead Man's Bend.

Ed Quigley himself could have done nothing with what was found inside.